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The Rock Film:
Film Genre and Notions of Authenticity in Rock Music
by
Eden Munro, B.A. Film Studies, University of Alberta
A thesis submitted to the Faculty of
Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
in Film Studies

Carleton University

Ottawa, Ontario

March 22, 2004

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Abstract

A virtual cavalcade of rock-centered films are available, yet it is difficult to find any substantial literature discussing the rock film as a genre. In fact, much of what has been written about the presence of rock music in film refuses to commit to the existence of a genre at all. Despite this general denial within the discipline, there is a large body of films that share a common stylistic, thematic, and ideological background, forming recurring narratives throughout the genre. The rock film is too often dismissed as simply a variation of the musical when it has its own concerns arising from its relationship with rock music. Notions of authenticity developed into an ideology of rock music, which was then adapted and supported by a particular group of films. This thesis explores the conjunction between film genre and rock music through the analysis of three major subgenres.

Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without the help of the following people, to whom I would like to express my gratitude: my supervisor, Paul Thberge, for his invaluable guidance throughout the project; Jim Dean and The Shaky Gallows House Band for much help in refining my ideas on authenticity in rock music; Gordan Calma for many early conversations about the rock film; my parents, Keith and Sue Munro, for their comments and editing on several drafts; and, most importantly, my wife, Leian Petersen, for always being there and providing support throughout this project.

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Introduction

The rock film is rarely discussed as a genre within the realm of film studies despite the existence of what would seem to be a large corpus of rock films. It has been a common approach to dismiss these films as a subgenre of the musical, but there is a fundamental difference between a musical featuring rock music and a rock film: in the musical, rock music tends to appear on a superficial level, rarely having any real impact upon the films' narratives. In contrast, the rock genre not only features rock music prominently, but also integrates the ideology of the music into its narratives.

The establishment of the rock film as a genre has been an evolving process which began gradually in the 1950s, picking up pace through the '60s and '70s, and entering a new phase with MTV in the 1980s. During the initial stages of its evolution the rock film is at times hardly recognizable as such. During the 1960s and 1970s, the most important and most visible films often resulted from the musicians' desire to control their own image in the public eye. However, these films were often relegated to limited distribution in movie theatres, keeping them out of view of a large component of rock fans. MTV brought the video image into the home in the 1980s, putting more importance than ever on the presentation of those playing the music. As a result, the video altered the fans' first impressions of the groups, tying the music in with the image inextricably. This was followed by theatrical releases of music films by artists such as The Rolling Stones (*Let's Spend The Night Together* [1982]), Prince (*Sign o' the Times* [1987]), U2 (*Rattle & Hum* [1988]), and Madonna (*Truth or Dare* [1991]), as well as fictional rock films such as *Purple Rain* (1984), *Light of Day* (1987), and *The Commitments* (1991). The result of the

increasing popularity of the rock film is that the group without some sort of film to their credit now tends to be the exception rather than the rule. The rock film has become an expected component of most musicians' careers.

Regardless of the cavalcade of rock films available to the fan, it is still difficult to find any substantial literature discussing the rock film as a genre within film studies. In fact, much of what has been written about the presence of rock music in film refuses to commit to the existence of a genre at all. Although there is a general denial within the discipline, there is a large body of films which, upon close examination, do appear to be linked both by an ideological backbone and by common visual tools (which themselves are often used to support the ideology of the genre).

Dave Marsh states that rock-oriented films "share too little to give them an adequate center, much less the distinction of a genre."¹ Disappointingly, Marsh says little to support his point, and, to date, neither has there been any in-depth consideration by others regarding the nature of Marsh's claim. The discipline of film studies has all but ignored the possibility of the rock film existing as a genre unto itself. Marsh goes further and expands upon his initial statement, demonstrating the general consensus regarding the rock film: "There isn't even a truly universal musical style here: disco, hard rock, folk rock, Fifties rockabilly, English pop, and Broadway-with-a-beat are all represented."² So the argument against the existence of a genre of rock films seems to be based upon the assumption that too much variety exists between the various films which might be considered as such. This argument ignores the fact that there are also a great number of

similarities between these 'rock oriented' films. At the very least, consideration must be given to the possibility that a rock genre does exist.

It might be easier to do as Marsh and so many others have done and simply dismiss the genre's existence without further thought, but this would be unfortunate since a serious study of the rock film affords us several unique opportunities. The rock film presents us with a chance to use the current canon of film genre work as a base from which to study a genre as it evolves over time. Granted, genre evolution has been tracked before, but next to the western or the science fiction film, the rock film is a relatively new genre. The western can be traced back to the very beginnings of film, and to literature before that. The earliest signs of the rock film, however, appear in a very rudimentary form soon after the emergence of rock 'n' roll music in the 1950s. This enables us to track the development of the genre in relation to another art-form: the music from which it takes its name. Unlike the western, or even the gangster film, which both have strong ties to literature, the rock film's relationship to rock music is not based upon the transformation of a written narrative into a visual one. Rather, rock music's effect upon the film genre is much more complicated, working thematically rather than being a literal translation of a particular narrative.

At the same time, the rock film's ideology is in some ways tied to that of the musical, a genre which pre-dates the rock film considerably. The genre is related to pre-existing film genres in a way that the western never was. At their most basic level, both the musical and the rock film rely on music for their very existence. The musical might seem the most obvious example of this relationship, and it is important, but it is not the

only one. The rock film is also related to the road film. The journey figures prominently in both genres, and the road film also has a tendency to integrate rock music into its narrative, much like the rock film does. While these are admittedly simplistic suggestions regarding the relationships between these genres, they do point to an area that is fertile for study. Through this study we might consider cross-pollination between genres, asking exactly how one genre might affect the development of another.

When approaching an argument as to the existence of the rock film as a genre, it would seem that Marsh's complaints, that there is too much variety in both the rock oriented films and in the musical styles dealt with in those films, are shared by many scholars regarding the rock film. To go beyond such assumptions, however, it is necessary to delve into some theoretical discussion regarding the nature of genres. Specifically, I will suggest, as Rick Altman has done, that genres are shifting forms which are altered throughout their existence by numerous elements. We should note here that the study of a specific genre must be necessarily selective.

The selective nature of genre study has also been noted by Altman: "Genre study produces satisfactory results only when it has the right type of material to work with, i.e., texts that clearly and simultaneously support all aspects of the standard generic trajectory."³ Marsh's claim then, takes on the shading of one that has been made without proper care in determining an adequate selection of texts with which to consider the existence of the genre. It is not necessary to examine every single film that has the remotest connection with rock music. What is required, in fact, is that one selects a

sample of films which might be used to represent the genre as a whole. Thus, the critic must set about determining which films should be included for the purpose of the study.

The process of selecting a group of relevant films is complex, involving more than simply locating a centre around which a genre may revolve. This is especially true if we accept Altman's suggestion regarding the instability of a genre's identity and borders. One might ask if there are no stable, predetermined borders, then how can there be a stable, unchanging centre to the genre as a whole? Even a genre as old and long-lasting as the western might be understood as something more complex than a group of films which make use of certain formal elements such as horses and guns. Thematic elements take on roles of increased importance and films can be considered in terms of both semantic and syntactic elements which evolve over time.

Many critics tend to employ the practice of using subgenres, drawing out the links between smaller groups of films in order to fill in the picture of the larger genre as a whole.⁴ This is not an obscure practice when dealing with film genres: Subgenres are a valued part of a discussion of any genre. As Altman says, one "method of assuring genres that are neat, manageable and stable is simply to subdivide broad genres into smaller units. Rather than take on the whole comic genre or even all of romantic comedy, Stanley Cavell (1981) trims down Hollywood comedy in *Pursuits of Happiness* to six comedies of remarriage."⁵ The Library of Congress, on their website for their Motion Picture / Broadcasting / Recorded Sound Division, have outlined a breakdown of what they see as a valid system of dividing genres into subgenres. A cursory examination of the generic definitions will reveal that there is no single genre which cannot be broken down further.

The western is broken down into categories which include terms such as the musical (*Annie Get Your Gun* [1950] and *Paint Your Wagon* [1969]) and the social problem (*The Ox-Bow Incident* [1943]); science fiction deals with horror (*Invasion of the Body Snatchers* [1956]) and survival (*Mysterious Island* [1961]); and the musical is broken down to include the show business musical (*42nd Street* [1933]), the Youth musical (*Grease* [1978]), and the Biographical musical (*Yankee Doodle Dandy* [1942]).⁶

In this thesis, I will argue that the rock genre does exist. Furthermore, I will demonstrate that the genre has strong roots in both preexisting film genres as well as in the ideology of rock music itself and its appeal to the notion of “authenticity.” At the same time, the rock film is not simply a subgenre of either the musical or the road film, but rather a genre that has its own unique concerns and its own unique way of approaching them.

This study will begin by developing a theoretical base in Chapter One from which to examine both genre in general, and the specific nature of the rock film in particular. I will elaborate upon the nature of genre, followed by an in-depth look at what the musical, the road film, and rock music bring to the rock film and to the significance of the journey as an element of rock narratives.

Chapter Two will take on the history of the genre, though it will not be a simple chronological listing of every film within the genre. Rather, the focus will be on the genre’s thematic content. I will point to the early films which bear some relation to the later films which arrive as the genre solidifies throughout the years. Finally, I will identify the three major subgenres which have crystallized within the larger genre.

The following three chapters will consist of case studies of the genre's three prominent subgenres. Chapter Three will deal with the subgenre which is structured around a particular event. Here the journey is metaphorical, rather than physical. The films under discussion in this chapter will be *Gimme Shelter* (1970) and *The Last Waltz* (1978), both of which will illustrate the particularities of the rock film's visual style, as well as the ways in which the journey varies between subgenres, giving each group of films its own unique personality.

The focus of Chapter Four will be with the tour film, illustrating the travelogue-like nature of the journey within these films through a discussion of *Hard Core Logo* (1996). The evolving nature of the genre will be examined, as well as expanding upon the subgenre's journey across space, through reference to *Rattle & Hum* (1988) and *Truth or Dare* (1991).

Chapter Five will take on the subgenre dealing with the rise and fall of a particular artist. The tendency for these films is for the journey to be an extremely personal one which takes place over time, rather than space. In this chapter I will focus upon *The Harder They Come* (1973) and *The Filth and the Fury* (2000), demonstrating how the characteristics of the rock film are often shared between documentary and fiction films within the genre.

Finally, the Conclusion will summarize and expand upon some of the most important points regarding the rock genre. I will also suggest areas which call for further investigation within the genre, as well as pointing outwards to areas where this study might lead to related investigations of the merger of film and rock music.

¹ Dave Marsh, "Schlock Around the Rock," *Film Comment* 14, no. 4 (July-August 1978): 7.

² Marsh, "Schlock Around the Rock," 7.

³ Rick Altman, *Film/Genre* (London: BFI Publishing, 1999), 17.

⁴ See, for example, Rick Altman, *The American Film Musical* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), Stanley Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), and R. Barton Palmer, *Hollywood's Dark Cinema: The American Film Noir* (London: Twayne Publishers, 1994).

⁵ Altman, *Film/Genre*, 17.

⁶ Brian Taves, Judi Hoffman and Karen Lund, "The Moving Image Genre-Form Guide," *The Library of Congress Motion Picture and Television Reading Room*, <http://lcweb.loc.gov/rr/mopic/migintro.html>.

Chapter 1

A Theoretical Basis for the Rock Genre

While there has been no substantial work done from the point of view that the rock film exists as a genre unto itself, there are a considerable number of theoretical discussions of both film and music genres which are of use here. These theories are important for understanding the rock film, since it stands as a unique example of a film genre which both developed from, and exists in conjunction with, other film genres, as well as in close relation to the ideology of rock music. As such, I wish to highlight a number of points here: the evolving nature of genre, and how we might reconcile that evolution so as to discuss the rock genre as more than transhistorical; the formal and thematic elements which interact to form a framework useful for identifying and discussing the genre's films; the nature of rock culture and its relation to authenticity, and how the rock film works to assimilate that culture into the genre; the journey as a narrative device which alters the focus of various films within the genre, leading to the development of subgenres; and the role of community in relation to the journey.

The rock film's origins are found in the conjunction of both filmic and musical forms. Drawing upon Rick Altman's ideas regarding the evolving nature of film genres, I will draw connections between some earlier film forms and the rock genre. Both Kathryn Kalinak and Scott Curtis' work on the cinematic exploitation of popular music will be referred to here. There are also a number of similarities between the rock film and the musical, particularly in terms of their ideological workings. As such, I will summarize Jane Feuer's suggestions regarding the backstage musical, while also pointing out exactly

how her ideas relate to the unique form of the rock genre. While the focus of my work is upon the role of ideology in the rock film, by no means do I wish to discount the role of formal, visual characteristics of the genre. To this end I will adapt and expand upon Edward Buscombe's work on the inner and outer forms of film genre. It is also not my wish to suggest that the rock genre has evolved in a strict, linear fashion. Steve Neale's concept of genre as a process involving both the films and the audience will be of use in discussing the solidifying of the rock film as a genre.

Neale's ideas of genre as a process are also useful in bringing into the discussion the specific nature of rock music, seeing as much of the rock genre's uniqueness comes from the conjunction of film and rock music. As such, Philip Auslander's description of "rock culture" and Simon Frith's work on the role of authenticity in rock music will both be of use. Authenticity in the rock genre often directly involves the idea of a journey as a narrative device, and so I will refer to David Laderman's work on the journey and the road film. Finally, I will look at the role of community in rock music, since this is also tied to both authenticity and the journey. Here I will draw largely upon Frith's work, while also pointing towards Franco Fabbri's work on musical communities and tying it all in with Feuer's ideas of ideology and the backstage musical.

The rock film did not spring forth fully formed and recognizable to all who view one of the films within the genre. And if it is true that one or several forms can eventually evolve into a commonly agreed upon genre, then it is also likely that these generic forms will continue to shift, rather than settling into permanent, stone-like structures. Altman notes that there is a tendency for generic terms to progress from adjectives to nouns:

The constant sliding of generic terms from adjective to noun offers important insight into film genres and their development. Before the western became a separate genre and a household word, there were such things as Western chase films, Western scenics, Western melodramas, Western romances, Western adventure films, and even Western comedies, Western dramas, and Western epics... In a similar manner, the musical was preceded by musical comedy, musical drama, musical romance, musical farce, and even the doubly redundant *all-talking, all-singing, all-dancing musical melodrama*.¹

So it is with the rock film. In the Introduction I suggested that the rock genre evolved out of the conjunction of several forms, both filmic and musical, to create a new, unique genre with its own specific concerns. The rock film exists as an evolving collection of formal and thematic elements which form the structure of the genre. Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that one of the driving forces behind the conjunction of rock music and film has always been Hollywood's desire to exploit the popularity of rock music, and specifically to exploit what that form offers to its fans. However, the foundations of the genre reach far back into the history of cinema.

From its very beginnings, the cinema has been involved with music. From the live piano accompaniment and first attempts at phonograph-based sound systems during the silent period to the eventual arrival of synchronized sound film, there has always been a desire among producers to marry moving images with musical accompaniment. Furthermore, in the same way that film producers would later exploit the popular success of rock music by using hit songs, Kathryn Kalinak argues that the desire for a musical soundtrack has always been coupled with a desire to exploit the familiar, favoring the known over the unknown:

The first American orchestral score is generally acknowledged as *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) by D.W. Griffith and Joseph Carl Breil. Little more than an elaborate cue sheet utilizing well-known classics such as Wagner's "Ride of the

Valkyrie” and Grieg’s “In the Hall of the Mountain King,” it did contain some originally composed music, including the famous “Love Theme.”²

The familiarity of a particular piece of music could ground even the most fantastic images in the viewer’s sense of reality. However, there were also other economically motivated reasons for using a particular piece of music, as is evidenced by a number of early animated series.

The early cartoons utilized many different songs, not all of which had achieved popularity with the public. Scott Curtis suggests that the key decision regarding which music to use lay in the ownership of the songs: “The musical director of the cartoons was heavily encouraged to use compositions owned by the studio.”³ He continues: “economics... had a clear influence on the musical director’s ‘way of thinking,’ so to speak, and on the choice of music for the cartoons.”⁴ This economic reasoning would come into play later where rock music and film (as well as television) were concerned.

Even more interesting than the economic discussion raised by Curtis, at least where rock and film are concerned, is his reminder of the struggle between image and sound as it is found in classical Hollywood cinema, and how it relates to Disney’s Mickey Mouse and Silly Symphonies series: “The image/sound hierarchy – in which sound is assumed to be motivated by the image and thus supplemental – has an almost allegorical status in the two series, where it holds true in one and is simply reversed in the other.”⁵ While Curtis discusses the variations of the hierarchy in terms of animation, this does raise some interesting points when we apply it to the films that would come to form the backbone of the rock film. Certainly, the general rule remains the same, in that the image motivates the accompanying sound, but there are times when the inverse does

appear to be true. Sound, and specifically music, tends to be linked with the image in the rock film much as it is in animation and the musical, with a tendency to present music as diegetically motivated.

There is a strong connection between the rock film and the musical. Both are intimately connected with music, so much so that if that connection were broken and the music removed, they would no longer be considered as part of their original genres. This is something that is exclusive to these films; the same is not true of genres such as the Western, the gangster film, or the romantic comedy. In these genres, while there may be certain tendencies or conventions as far as the music is concerned, there are no set rules as to what type of music can or cannot be used (for example, compare the orchestral score of *The Magnificent Seven* [1960] with the guitar heavy score of *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* [1966]), or even regarding whether any music at all must be used. I should say that I am not suggesting that the musical can only use one style of music (compare *Meet Me in St. Louis* [1944] and *South Pacific* [1958] with *Jesus Christ Superstar* [1973] and *Grease* [1978]), just that the musical, by its very nature, needs music to exist. The same holds true for the rock genre: a film can hardly be a rock film if it does not in some way involve rock music.

There are a number of specific points to which I wish to draw attention regarding the musical. Jane Feuer has written on the nature of this genre, primarily in the area of one particular subgenre of the musical:

Within the musical film the most persistent subgenre has involved kids (or adults) “getting together and putting on a show”... The backstage pattern was always central to the genre. Incorporated into the structure of the art musical was the very

type of popular entertainment represented by the musical film itself. The art musical is thus a self-referential form.⁶

Feuer's account of the backstage, or art musical, involves a number of ideas which are extremely useful in a study of the rock film. While the rock film does not follow an identical template (for example, characters generally do not suddenly break out into song and dance. The musical performances in the rock film tend to be derived from the narrative, both in fiction and documentary films, though there are certainly exceptions to this rule), the backstage area, and what it symbolizes, would become invaluable to the rock film.

In suggesting that the backstage musical assumed a self-referential form, Feuer posits the musical's use of this self-referentiality as being ideological in nature. The primary operation at work in the backstage musical is the 'mythologizing' of entertainment. Feuer suggests that if we are to understand this process of 'mythologizing', we must consider three possible interpretations of the word 'myth.' First, there is the simplest interpretation: "it means that entertainment is shown as having greater value than it actually does."⁷ Myths, in this sense, are constructions based upon deceptions which "are willingly suffered by the audience."⁸

The second interpretation called upon is that of Albert F. McLean, who discusses the nature of deception in myth:

[A myth is a] constellation of images and symbols, whether objectively real or imaginary, which brings focus and a degree of order to the psychic (largely unconscious) processes of a group or society and in so doing endows a magical potency upon the circumstances of persons involved."⁹

In this version, myth is considered to be less of a deception and more of a window clarifying the collective values of the group involved.

The third interpretation of myth comes from Claude-Lévi Strauss: “the seemingly random surface structure of a myth masks contradictions which are real and therefore unresolvable.”¹⁰ Drawing attention to these varying interpretations allows Feuer to suggest:

Art musicals are structurally similar to myths, seeking to mediate contradictions in the nature of popular entertainment. The myth of entertainment is constituted by an oscillation between demystification and remythification. Musicals, like myths, exhibit a stratified structure. The ostensible or surface function of these musicals is to give pleasure to the audience by revealing what goes on behind the scenes in the theater or Hollywood, that is, to demystify the production of entertainment. But the films remythify at another level than that which they set out to expose. Only unsuccessful performances are demystified. The musical desires an ultimate valorization of entertainment; to destroy the aura, reduce the illusion, would be to destroy the myth of entertainment as well.”¹¹

This process of demystification and remythification is essential to the rock film in much the same way as it is for the backstage musical. The rock film seeks to unite performers with their audiences through the process of demystification, but ultimately it is necessary for the films to remythify so that the performers and audience remain divided, thus infusing the artists with a mythic appeal and the audience with the necessary desire for the performers (and the performances). The myth of entertainment, however, is not a monolithic concept. Just as film genres consist of many overlapping subgenres, the myth of entertainment too can be further broken down into three categories: the myth of spontaneity, the myth of integration, and the myth of the audience. These subcategories call for further consideration since, again, they will be shown to come to bear directly upon the composition of the rock film.

While the three subcategories tend to overlap with one another, it is often the myth of spontaneity which is foregrounded on the screen. In Feuer's opinion, "perhaps the primary positive quality associated with musical performance is its spontaneous emergence out of a joyous and responsive attitude toward life."¹² Though she mentions this in relation to the art musical, we will see later that this is a quality that is very much associated with rock music itself. In the musical, a spontaneous performance is promoted as a successful performance and, in contrast, an unsuccessful performance is one which does not spring forth naturally from the merging of the performer and his/her surroundings. An unsuccessful performance is considered canned, or rehearsed too much, to the point where the performance is no longer depicted as a representation of the performer's true (and honest) self.

It might be argued that the successful performances which conclude many backstage musicals are hardly spontaneous bursts of creative energy, but, in fact, highly rehearsed spectacles. However, the real measure of success in these films hinges upon whether or not the performers are able to "render invisible the technology of production in order to achieve the effect of effortlessness by which all entertainment succeeds in winning its audience."¹³ Thus, the myth of spontaneity governs the success or failure of performances both onstage and off.

Though it might at first seem that onstage performances are a different creature from those held offstage, they are in reality intimately connected. In order to be deemed a success, the onstage performance must disguise the trappings of technology, hiding them in such a way that the myth of spontaneity is not fractured. It is in much the same way

that the offstage performance, taking place backstage, on the street, or anywhere in between, must be structured so that technology does not invade and supercede the naturalness of the setting, and of the performers themselves. Feuer expands upon the way in which this sense of spontaneity is achieved: “The impression of spontaneity in these numbers stems from a type of *bricolage*; the performers make use of props-at-hand – curtains, movie paraphernalia, umbrellas, furniture – to create the imaginary world of the musical performance.”¹⁴ It is precisely this imaginary world which connects the on and offstage performances; the standard visual laws no longer apply in this world. Instead, it is here that:

Musical entertainment... takes on a natural relatedness to life processes and to the lives of its audience. Musical entertainment claims for its own all natural and joyous performances in art and in life. The myth of spontaneity operates (to borrow Lévi Strauss’s terminology) to make musical performance, which is actually part of culture, appear to be part of nature.¹⁵

The second subdivision of the myth of entertainment, the myth of integration, operates in such a way that “successful performances are intimately bound up with success in love, with the integration of the individual into a community or a group, and even with the merger of high art with popular art.”¹⁶ In the musical, it is important that a connection is established between the performer and the audience, since one of the ultimate goals of these performances is to integrate the performer with those surrounding him/her. This is often achieved through a repetitive structure, moving the performer from isolation to integration. Feuer offers an explanation for the importance of, and reliance upon, the myth of integration:

Everyone knows that the musical film was a mass art produced by a tiny elite for a vast and amorphous consuming public; the self-reflective musical attempts to

overcome this division through the myth of integration. It offers a vision of musical performance originating in the folk, generating love and a cooperative spirit which includes everyone in its grasp and which can conquer all obstacles. By promoting audience identification with the collectively produced shows, the myth of integration seeks to give the audience a sense of participation in the creation of the film itself. The musical film becomes a mass art which aspires to the condition of folk art – produced and consumed by the same integrated community.¹⁷

While the myth of integration seeks to integrate the performer (and the performance) with the audience, the myth of the audience both seeks to facilitate that integration and to prevent it. Feuer suggests that “successful performances will be those in which the performer is sensitive to the needs of his audience and which give the audience a sense of participation in the performance.”¹⁸ Further consideration of this definition of a successful performance reveals that, as with the myth of spontaneity, it is the appearance that is important. While the unsuccessful performance of an insensitive performer might consist of obvious attempts to control the audience, a successful performance is in reality no less manipulative of its audience. The real difference between success and failure is again in the ability to obscure those manipulations. Thus, it might be better said that successful performances will be those in which the performer obscures his manipulation and control of the audience, thereby appearing to be sensitive to the needs of his audience and, in so doing, smoothing over the difficulties involved in giving the audience a sense of participation in the performance.

The same is true of the actual films:

While setting up an association between success and lack of audience manipulation, the musicals themselves exert continuous control over the responses of their audiences. The film musical profits rhetorically by displacing to the theater the myth of a privileged relationship between musical entertainment and its audience. Popular theater can achieve a fluidity and immediacy in this

respect that the film medium lacks. The out-of-town tryout, the interpolation of new material after each performance, the instantaneous modulation of performer to audience response – none of these common theatrical practices is possible for film. Hollywood had only the limited adaptations made possible by the preview system and the genre system itself which accommodated audience response by making (or not making) other films of the same type. The backstage musical, however, manages to incorporate the immediate performer-audience relationship into films, thus gaining all the advantages of both media.¹⁹

Feuer perceptively notes that this merging of performer and audience is achieved through those techniques which are exclusive to film, first and foremost among these being the advantage of the camera's mobility. Where the theater audience remains seated in front of the stage, with each audience member occupying a single vantage point for the duration of the performance, the camera allows the film's audience to occupy nearly any point of view. Thus, the film's audience might begin by occupying the same position as a theatrical audience, only to be invited forward onto the stage where they are able to stand amongst the performers themselves, the action swirling around them.

The camera of the backstage musical is an ideological tool for the filmmaker. On the one hand it provides the audience with a freedom that cannot be achieved during theatrical performances. On the other hand, that freedom is, in reality, a carefully controlled illusion, entirely dependent upon the will of the filmmaker. A theatrical audience, while confined to a particular place within the theater, may choose what they wish to focus upon from everything and everyone on the stage. A film audience still has a choice, but the array of possibilities is much slimmer when faced with a frame of film that consists of little more than a close up of the performer's face or feet, or even one in which the camera is focused on a select number of performers to the exclusion of everything that surrounds them. Thus, the film audience ostensibly gains more freedom

than the theatrical audience, but the film is actually manipulating the viewer far more forcefully than is done in the theater. Feuer explains this manipulation by way of merging of theatrical and filmic space in reference to a sequence in the musical *The Band Wagon* (1953):

The Band Wagon uses this double perspective to manipulate the film audience's point of view. In 'That's Entertainment,' Cordova and the Martons try to convince Tony that all successful art is entertainment. The number takes place on the stage of an empty theater with the first refrain of the song shot from camera positions that approximate the view of a spectator *on* the stage (angles available only to the cinema). Midway through the number, at the point where Tony is convinced, the action shifts to the performing area of the stage and the point of view shifts to that of a spectator in the theater. The film audience sees, from the point of view of a theater audience, the number performed in the empty theater becoming a direct address to the film's audience. The effort to convince Tony has become an effort to convince *us*. In the reprise of 'That's Entertainment' at the film's finale, the point of view shifts from over-the-shoulder shots to frame the performers directly in front of the camera as they ask us to celebrate once again the merging of all art into entertainment, this time in the form of the film *The Band Wagon* itself.²⁰

The mobile camera assumes the responsibility for the point of view of the film audience, but there is also another, more subtle ideological tool at work in the backstage musical: "The use of theatrical audiences *in* the films provides a point of identification for audiences *of* the film."²¹ The use of the audience within the film accomplishes two things (which are by no means exclusive of each other). First, the audience within the film acts as a representation of the joy (or disappointment, in the case of an unsuccessful performance) which "the number itself sought to arouse from the film's audience."²² In the musical, performances are not strictly relegated to the space of the theater. Many performances take place offstage, but this does not diminish the audience's role by any means. Here, too, the audience acts as a representation of the feelings of the film's audience. However, unlike the theatrical audience, the audience of an offstage

performance is not confined within an area designed for the viewing of a performance. In fact, most offstage performances begin with little or no audience at all. Like the offstage performance itself, these audiences appear spontaneous and natural. As a result, the spontaneous performance serves to connect the performer with the audience, taking the performer from a solitary existence/performance to a communal one as he begins to interact with the people around him:

Audiences in the films suggest a contagious spirit inherent in musical performance, related to the suggestion that the MGM musical is folk art; the audience must be shown as participating in the production of entertainment.²³

Feuer's discussion is largely concerned with the ideological nature of the myth of entertainment. The three subcategories of the myth are of much importance in the rock genre. To some extent they work in much the same way as they do in the backstage musical. Rock performances are depicted as spontaneous events, even when they are the farthest thing from it. In *Truth or Dare* (1991), we see Madonna being informed that if she performs a particular part of her stage show, she will be arrested. Even though Madonna's entire show is well-rehearsed, the film presents the actual performance as something much more spontaneous when she chooses to go ahead and include the regular segment in the performance. As it turns out, there are few consequences to this decision, but the film presents Madonna's choice to include the performance as a daring, spontaneous action in the name of art.

In the rock film, the myth of integration presents a problem similar to that faced by the theatrical performances of the backstage musical. The very setup of a rock performance includes a stage setup which divides the performer from the audience. In

order to obscure this division, the rock genre works to remove performers from the stage, placing them in situations where they might mix with the audience (The Rolling Stones sitting in the crowd to sing “Salt of the Earth” in *The Rolling Stones’ Rock and Roll Circus* [1968] or guitar player Russell Hammond going to a house party with some fans in *Almost Famous* [2000]).

As in the musical, the myth of the audience also works to obscure the division between performer and audience. At the most basic level, we see the performers themselves working to appear as though the audience is a part of the show (the audience singing along in the aforementioned performance in *The Rolling Stones’ Rock and Roll Circus*, Jim Morrison speaking to and asking questions of the audience in *The Doors* [1991]). The myth of the audience becomes more complex, however, when the camera is used as an ideological tool. As in the musical, the camera is used to move the film audience’s viewing position around, variously placing us in front of the stage with the concert audience, on stage with the performers, or even, as in *Almost Famous*, to the side of the stage with the fans who are lucky enough to have an influence upon the band and their music (also an overlapping of the myths of integration and audience).

The rock film, like all film genres, has evolved throughout its existence. While no strict chronological development exists (as I will demonstrate in more detail in the following chapter), general patterns do emerge. However, if we are to understand just what it is that makes up the genre, then films made in the mid-1950s must be considered alongside ones made during more recent years. When considering films which have been released over such a wide period of time as being part of the same genre, questions arise

regarding the stability of the genre itself. Is the genre an object which, once formed, remains stable? Do the borders of the genre always remain the same? And what of the formal and thematic elements? The answer here, I believe, is both yes and no. In a particular film genre, there will be certain elements which tend to remain similar throughout the genre's existence. It would be a strange sight to see a western which does not include the use of guns and horses, and even stranger to see one with a setting other than the past. A film may have all of the same thematic elements of the western, yet if the formal elements are too varied, the film will be an unlikely inclusion within the western genre. Edward Buscombe suggests that a genre cannot be identified by formal or thematic elements alone:

This idea of both inner and outer forms seems essential, for if we require only the former, in terms of subject matter, then our concept will be too loose to be of much value; and if only the latter, then the genre will be ultimately meaningless, since devoid of content.²⁴

Altman says something similar in *Film/Genre*:

In order to be recognized as a genre, films must have both a common topic... and a common structure, a common way of configuring that topic. Even when films share a common topic, they will not be perceived as members of a genre unless that topic systematically receives treatment of the same type.²⁵

Altman cites *Star Wars* (1977) as an example of the necessity for a commonality in the treatment of similar topics if a film is to be included as part of an existing genre. He further suggests that, although some critics, recognizing the typical structure of the western in *Star Wars*, tried to include the film as a part of the western genre, the attempt was unsuccessful “for the general tendency of genre theorists and the popular audience alike is to recognize genre only when both subject and structure coincide.”²⁶ This was not

the case in *Star Wars*, due in large part to the disparity between that film's formal elements and those commonly found in the western, despite the familiarity of some of its thematic elements. As a result, while sometimes being referred to as a western in space, and despite sharing certain thematic characteristics with the western, *Star Wars* is better categorized as science fiction, due to its otherworldly setting and the laser guns and spaceships which take the place of six shooters and horses. As such, it is highly unlikely that *Star Wars* would ever be used alongside *My Darling Clementine* (1946) and *High Noon* (1952) in a study of the western.

If one is able to identify both formal and thematic elements of genre films separated by decades, then one might generally assume that certain elements will remain similar in a given genre, so that even the casual observer will be able to identify both *The Virginian* (1929) and *The Outlaw Josey Wales* (1976) as westerns, despite their differences and the forty-seven years separating their releases. The same can be said of rock films such as *Woodstock* (1970) and *Truth or Dare*: the films are admittedly different in many ways, but enough elements remain the same or similar that the two films might be included within the same genre. If the elements of two films vary too widely, then they will not be considered as belonging to the same genre.

Buscombe's model of the western's outer form provides a breakdown of potential formal elements into four categories: the setting, the clothing, the tools of the trade, and the miscellaneous, recurring physical objects. I will briefly apply that model here to the rock film, summarizing some of its formal characteristics. First we have the settings, which, as in the backstage musical, often include a venue designed for performance. This

is one of the elements linking *Woodstock* and *Truth or Dare* together, as both of these films give over screen time to live concert performances. Additionally, hotel rooms and roads appear frequently throughout the genre, especially in the subgenre revolving around the tour. The hotel room emphasizes the homelessness of the performers, while the road, often long and winding through large, open spaces, is an indicator of the importance of the journey within the genre.

Clothing also provides a commonality between the rock genre's films in much the same way that it does in the Western or the gangster film. In terms of the performers, there is a tendency towards flamboyant clothing, indicating a certain type of character. The clothing does an excellent job of emphasizing the performer's individuality in comparison to that of the audience, while still retaining enough similarities that the film viewer does not think that the rock performer has wandered into a Sunday church service. In contrast, the business men in the rock film are often seen in suit and tie, separating them from both the musicians and the fans.

In the rock film, the most visible tools of the trade would be those musical instruments commonly employed in rock music: guitars, bass, drums, keyboards, and microphones.²⁷ Again, the frequency with which these tools occur in the genre lead to a tendency for live performances to occur in films from throughout the genre's history. Regarding the Western, Buscombe includes the horse in this category, so we might include the rock band's tour bus or van, another indicator of the performer's homelessness and the value placed upon the journey.

The final category of formal characteristics, miscellaneous, recurring objects, might include alcohol, drugs, and cigarettes. Often, as in *The Doors* and *Almost Famous*, we see authority figures, such as producers or managers, trying to assert power over the performers by chastising them for drug use. As such, the use of illicit substances then becomes a representation of the character's 'free spirit.'

As Buscombe stresses, it is not necessary that all of these elements appear in a film belonging to the genre in question. It is, however, necessary for at least some of them to appear, and for them to intersect with particular themes which are common to that genre. The formal elements, then, "provide a framework within which the story can be told."²⁸ It should be stressed that the framework itself is not enough to constitute a genre, and that the formal elements of the rock film can appear in films of other genres (the electric guitar in *Back to the Future* [1985] and the tour bus in *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* [1994]).

One must also consider the thematic elements and their relationship to the formal elements, since certain formal elements result in a tendency towards certain themes.

Buscombe suggests that, in the western:

The formal elements of the genre make it hard to deal with subjects that presuppose in the characters an interest in, and a time for, the heart's affections. It is also likely that, given the arsenal of weapons on view in the films, violence will play a crucial part in the stories.²⁹

I would argue, then, that the specific formal elements of the rock film will have the same effect in that there will be a tendency within the genre to treat a select group of themes related to these formal elements. Buscombe's suggestion might be reinterpreted, in terms of the rock film, to say that, given the selection of musical instruments on view in the

films, live performance will often play a crucial part in the stories. This ensures that the relationship between performers and fans will be an important theme within the genre, just as it is in the backstage musical. As well, the appearance of managers and other individuals concerned with money means that there will be some emphasis upon the struggle between art and commerce. Finally, we can say that the preponderance of roads and vehicles in the genre lend themselves to a commentary upon the homelessness of the performers.

Still, genres are far from stable objects with borders that are set in stone. Were this true, then there would be little variation between films within the same genre. But this is not the case: differences do exist between films of the same genre, and genres are not transhistorical. However, as Altman notes, “the very act of identifying a genre requires that generic texts be lifted out of time and placed in a timeless holding area as if they were all contemporaries.”³⁰ In considering the connections between *Woodstock* and *Truth or Dare*, the implication is that the rock film as a genre has remained stable between 1970 and 1991. While this is true of certain aspects of the genre, there are other ways in which the films have varied considerably. This is the case even between films released within only a few years, and sometimes even between films by the same filmmaker. If we consider that rock documentaries tend to lean towards one of three major subgenres (the tour, the event, or the rise and fall), then we can note that within only a couple of years D.A. Pennebaker had worked with two of these forms: *Don't Look Back* (1967) followed Bob Dylan throughout his last solo acoustic tour of England, while

Pennebaker's *Monterey Pop* (1969) took a second approach, documenting one particular event.

Despite the overwhelming tendency to posit genres as transhistorical objects, there is a way to account for variations within the films. As Steve Neale suggests, genre is better understood as a process wherein three levels interact:

The level of expectation, the level of the generic corpus, and the level of the "rules" or "norms" that govern both. Each new genre film constitutes an addition to an existing generic corpus and involves a selection from the repertoire of generic elements available at any one point in time. Some elements are included; others are excluded... In addition, each new genre film tends to extend this repertoire, either by adding a new element or by transgressing one of the old ones... In this way the elements and conventions of a genre are always *in play* rather than being simply *replayed*; and any generic corpus is always being expanded.³¹

Thinking about genre in this way means that one can account not only for alterations in genres, but also for shifts forwards and backwards. By this I mean that there is no direct progression for the genre.

Altman identifies two recent approaches to genre studies. In the first, genres are treated as living beings, with individual films reflecting specific age brackets. In the second approach, biological evolution is the model of choice.³² Both of these approaches share the same weakness: that genres are assumed to develop along predictable lines. Thus, one would assume that *Truth or Dare* would have much more in common with *Rattle and Hum* (1988) than with any of the older films. However, examination of the films reveals that *Truth or Dare* is more akin, at least on the surface, to *Don't Look Back*. Both of these films are structured around a length of time coinciding with the length of a specific tour, as is *Rattle and Hum*; the difference comes in the performances or, in the

case of *Truth or Dare* and *Don't Look Back*, the lack of performances. Both films do include a few select live performances, but there is a far greater concentration on scenes of Dylan and Madonna off stage, whether it be backstage prior to a performance or away from the concert venue completely. *Rattle and Hum* in contrast features twenty songs performed live throughout its ninety-eight minute running time. Scenes of U2 offstage are not neglected completely, but there are considerably fewer of them than in the other two films.

My point here is that, rather than developing in a predictable and straightforward direction, the rock genre has taken a path more akin to what Neale describes. Perhaps it would be better to say that, rather than following a single, predetermined path, it has taken a number of different paths, which diverge and converge at numerous different points. Rather than negating the forms of previous rock films, *Rattle and Hum*, upon its release, offered up new elements which might then be chosen from and mixed with elements of previous films. Likewise, *Truth or Dare*, coming after *Rattle and Hum*, was not relegated to following the pattern set forth by the U2 film.

If the generic corpus is largely the realm of the film industry (at least in terms of the physical product that the audience is able to watch in theaters), then the level of expectation is primarily a quality of the film audience (again, this is not an absolute rule; however, the expectation that I am dealing with here is that of the audience rather than of those on the side of the film industry). If we accept Neale's suggestion that genres are processes rather than the groups of films themselves, then we can also accept his notion that genres do not consist only of films:

They consist also, and equally, of specific systems of expectation and hypothesis that spectators bring with them to the cinema and that interact with films themselves during the course of the viewing process, providing spectators with a means of recognition and understanding.³³

This is especially useful in the case of the rock film, a genre which exists as the conjunction between film and rock music. The spectators bring with them not only systems of expectation based upon previous films, but also those systems of expectation and hypothesis based upon the ideology of rock music.

Having dealt with some of the basic concepts regarding film genres, I will now turn to the process of rock culture. Philip Auslander explains:

By “rock culture,” I mean the cultural formation that includes and surrounds rock music itself, a culture whose main adherents are: on the production side, musicians, their producers, and those peopling the apparatus of the music industry; on the reception side, rock music fans and critics. I have in mind something similar to what Lawrence Grossberg³⁴ calls “the rock formation,” a term he uses to suggest that “the identity and effect of rock always depend on more than its sonorial dimension... We always locate musical practices in the context of a complex... set of relations with other cultural and social practices...” With Grossberg, I acknowledge that there is diversity within rock culture but justify the use of a seemingly monolithic concept by pointing out that “there is some unified sense to ‘rock’... the overemphasis on locality and specificity often leads us away from important generalities, as well as from the fact that such generalities are part of the reality of the local articulations.”³⁵

Auslander suggests “that rock exists primarily as recorded music and that rock culture is organized around recordings.”³⁶ While he does not deal with rock films, I think that some of what Auslander says is applicable here. Specifically, his discussion of authenticity is useful. Auslander suggests “that the visual artifacts of rock serve a particular function within rock culture.”³⁷ The function he speaks of is the establishment of the authenticity of rock music. Auslander turns to Simon Frith for a definition of authenticity, highlighting two important points: “that authenticity can be heard in the music, yet is an

effect not just of the music itself but also of prior musical and extra-musical knowledge and beliefs; that what counts as authentic varies among musical genres and subgenres.”³⁸

We might think of this in terms of Rick Altman’s previous statement on genre: a variance in a genre film does not preclude its inclusion in that particular genre. Authenticity is at stake in all forms of rock music, though its definition may vary. As such, just as rock music might be subdivided into musical styles as disparate as pop rock, hard rock, or folk rock, so might the rock genre include films such as *Truth or Dare*, dealing with the pop rock of Madonna, next to the punk rock of *Hard Core Logo* (1996).

Regarding rock culture, it should be said that, while rock is often seen as being the antithesis of pop music – a music that is somehow more ‘real’, more authentic than the manufactured sounds of pop – the truth is that rock music is no less of a commodity, mass-produced and mass-consumed as much as pop music.³⁹ An argument exists where rock is linked with folk music, but, as Simon Frith suggests, the connection is not in how rock music is made, but in how it works: “Rock is taken to express (or reflect) a way of life: rock is *used* by its listeners as a folk music – it articulates communal values, comments on shared social problems.”⁴⁰ This recalls Feuer’s suggestion that the backstage musical is a type of folk-art. Frith goes on to say that there are two components to the rock-folk argument, the first being that “the music was an authentic ‘reflection of experience’.”⁴¹ Here is where the values of folk music are transferred onto rock music: “The argument was that folk music was a music made directly, spontaneously, by the rural communities themselves; it was the music of working people and expressed their communal experience of work.”⁴² And that is the second component of the rock-folk

argument: that, as in folk music, there is no dividing line between the audience and the performer. Those who sing the songs are seen to occupy the same position in life, the same standing, as those who are in the audience.

At this point the argument begins to falter somewhat. Rock music takes as its own the ideologies of folk music, but the very nature of the rock concert erects a dividing line between the performer and the audience. While the performer occupies the stage, the audience occupies a separate area from which they can watch, but not touch, the performers. Again, this ideology of rock is very similar to that of the backstage musical. The goal of each form is to at once divide the performers and the audience, and also to paper over those cracks, making them invisible to the audience. To this end, ideology may be the rock film's strongest ally: "Ideology can not only give more importance to certain rules compared to others, but can actually conceal some, when these are found to be in contrast with others considered more 'noble'."⁴³ This is precisely why the rock film is driven by a desire to attain, and retain, authenticity, in order to hide the manufactured nature of rock music, in terms of its reliance upon capitalist machinery for promotional purposes, not to mention the technological origins of rock records.

In the rock film, authenticity is often directly tied to the idea of a journey. Specifically, there is much importance placed upon the beginning and the end of the journey. I will make some brief comments on the journey here, returning to it in much more detail in Chapters 3, 4, and 5. In his examination of road films, *Driving Visions: Exploring The Road Movie*, David Laderman devotes some discussion to the role of rock music within the genre. As such, he suggests that the "rock 'n' road" movie exists as a

subgenre of the road movie. The basis for this subgenre is a plot involving either rock musicians or fans out on the road: “Rock ‘n’ road movies bring into clear focus the truly formative link between rock music and the road movie, both cultural offspring of 1950s youth culture and the 1960s counterculture.”⁴⁴ I agree with Laderman’s assertion that both the road movie and rock music emerged from common origins, and there is certainly a place within the road film for discussion of this subgenre. However, the reverse is also true: the rock ‘n’ road movie might also be examined within the context of the rock film as a genre unto itself. In doing so, it is illuminating to consider the meaning of the journey, the most basic of the concepts found in the road movie (and one which also translates readily to the rock film).

Laderman is well aware of the importance of the journey in the road film and much of his discussion on the meaning of the journey is relevant to the rock film. Laderman turns to the role of the journey narrative in literature as a point of origin, suggesting that one thing which ties together the journey narrative in literature and film is the tendency for using the journey as a cultural critique. The most basic definition of a journey might be to travel from one place to another, but it is the deeper meanings of this act of travel that are of concern here. Laderman begins his discussion with what he posits as the original journey narrative, Homer’s *Odyssey*:

The tale of Odysseus’s rambling trajectory to Ithaca after the Trojan War is framed by his imprisonment as the novel begins, and his home, to which he longs to return. The journey itself, fantastic and often grotesque, stages a series of episodes and “detours” that lure him from his goal of returning home. There is a sense in which Homer is perpetually postponing the end of the journey, by distracting Odysseus from his desire to reclaim his identity as King of Ithaca. This emphasizes the journey over the destination, questioning the presumed validity of the latter.⁴⁵

This emphasis on the journey itself, as opposed to the ultimate destination, is a key factor in the rock film's use of the journey narrative as a basic plot structure. As Laderman suggests, the journey in literature is often used for the purpose of some sort of social commentary. This is true also of the journey in the rock film, for many of the same reasons that literature has used the journey:

The very birth and adolescence of America seems crucially founded upon the notion of the journey, which thus becomes an essential feature of American cultural identity. Janis P. Stout contends that the journey narrative characterizes so much American literature because the journey is so essentially embedded in American national history, a history that "begins with voyages, of exploration or escape or migration."⁴⁶

Laderman expands upon the role of the journey in literature, referring to Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, in which the title character takes to the Mississippi River, on the run with an escaped slave named Jim as his companion: "the novel implies that living with nature (represented by the journey downriver) is more pure and authentic than the culture observed from a fluid distance."⁴⁷ In this way, the journey is imbued with more than just the 'historical' importance to which Stout assigned it. Now, the journey becomes, as Laderman suggested, a social commentary. As a genre, the rock film does the same thing, as is evidenced by its emphasis upon the authenticity of the music, the performers, and the fans, in the face of the plastic, manufactured 'other' of the capitalist industry and its so-called 'constructed' stars.

Being as it is that the rock film as a genre is intimately linked with rock music, it is understandable that the purpose of community in the rock film is much the same as in rock music. Franco Fabbri talks of the musical community being a group which is

structured by the same range of rules as the genre itself.⁴⁸ The rules of the rock community, then, are linked with those of rock music in general. Simon Frith's discussion of the rock-folk argument is again of interest here. As we know, this argument is based upon the music being both an authentic reflection of 'experience' and an authentic reflection of community.⁴⁹ This is something that the rock-folk argument shares with the myth of integration as described by Feuer. Frith suggests, however, that "the paradox of rock ideology... was that performers' claims to represent a community (unlike the usual 'plastic' pop singers) were supported by the marks of their individuality... The music (whether folk or pop or rock) is not made *by* a community, but provides particular sorts of communal *experience*."⁵⁰ It is in the interest of this communal experience that the rock film works to tie together the performers and the fans. It is also not surprising that the genre is so centered upon the idea of a struggle between the various sides: "Most rock history is written in terms of a struggle between the people (musicians, fans) and the companies."⁵¹ However, we need to remember that the struggle has more than two sides. Frith argues:

The music created its community by keeping other people out, and the resulting community was transient – people grew up, tastes changed, real friends and relations were elsewhere, at home and work. Rock 'n' roll made cultural sense not as an experience in itself, but in the context of a specific experience of work and power.⁵²

We can take two points from this statement. First, the community is not particular about whom it keeps out. The outsiders need not be, indeed cannot be, only the companies. As such, those excluded from the rock community also include fans of pop. Philip Auslander elaborates: "The ideological distinction between rock and pop is precisely the distinction

between the authentic and the inauthentic, the sincere and the cynical, the genuinely popular and the slickly commercial, the potentially resistant and the necessarily co-opted, art and entertainment.”⁵³ He goes on to note that what counts for authenticity often varies not just between pop and rock, but also between the various subgenres of rock itself: “Rock’s authenticity effects are thus dependent on the nomination of something to serve as the inauthentic Other, whether that thing is current pop music or other rock.”⁵⁴ So the struggle that exists is not merely between the fans/performers and the companies, but also between various groups of fans.

The second point to be made from Frith’s statement is in regards to the transient nature of the community. It is precisely this homelessness that results in the precarious relationship between the fans and the performers themselves that we have seen in the films under discussion. Because of the nature of this community, the role of the rock film becomes in large part an effort to paper over the cracks which exist in the relationship between the performers and their fans.

The rock film as a genre relies intensely upon authenticity as a unifying theme amongst the films. This theme does not emerge in a vacuum, however, as it is intimately related to, and a natural export from, rock music itself. Thus, the rock film internalizes the ideology of rock music, through the folk-rock argument, and externalizes this ideology as the myth of entertainment. Furthermore, despite the emphasis upon the struggle which is inherent in both of these lines of argument, the genre works, in large part, to smooth over any contradictions in the struggle. It is to this end that the rock film always works to reunite the performers and the fans in the end, returning them both to

their ‘earthy’ origins and positing them against the music industry as a whole. The method for this return is often through an emphasis upon the journey and the community-building aspects of that journey, which leads to an interpretation of the authentic nature of those who create the music, which carries over to the music itself, and, in turn, to the listeners of that music. And, in the end, the rock film acts as an ideological tool for rock music, preserving the mythology to which it is so connected.

A framework begins to appear as we consider various film and music genre theories. It becomes apparent that at one time it may have been a valid comment to suggest that the rock film is not a genre unto itself. However, like the many genres before it, the rock film has evolved into its own genre, developing out of those films which came before. The musical holds the most obvious connection, with numerous points of comparison, but the rock film is not simply a rock version of a musical. Rather, the genre has many unique concerns. It is through the specific combination of the rock film’s inner and outer forms that these concerns have been molded into a separate genre. Still, while it is important to keep an eye on the developing nature of the genre, it is equally important to remember where the genre’s origins lie. For the rock film, the inner form tends to be related to the ideology of rock music, which in turn can be traced to that of folk music, bringing us full circle back to the musical and its emphasis on the myth of entertainment. All of this leads into the rock film’s reliance on authenticity as its major defining factor. Authenticity is the one theme which retains its importance throughout the evolution of the genre. The emphasis upon this theme comes about in large part due to the genre’s use of the journey and the community in linking the band with the music and the audience,

and through these tools, authenticity becomes the most valuable component in discussing the rock film as a unique genre.

¹ Rick Altman, *Film/Genre* (London: BFI Publishing, 1999), 53.

² Kalinak, *Settling The Score* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 53.

³ Scott Curtis "The Sound of the Early Warner Bros. Cartoons," in *Sound Theory/Sound Practice*, ed. Rick Altman (New York: Routledge, 1992), 193.

⁴ Curtis, "The Sound," 194.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Jane Feuer, "The Self-reflective Musical and the Myth of Entertainment," in *Genre, the Musical: A Reader*, ed. Rick Altman (London: BFI, 1981), 160.

⁷ Ibid., 161.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 161-162.

¹⁰ Ibid., 162.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 165.

¹⁴ Ibid., 163.

¹⁵ Ibid., 165-166.

¹⁶ Ibid., 166.

¹⁷ Ibid., 168.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 169.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 170.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Edward Buscombe, "The Idea of Genre" in *Film Genre Reader II*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 13.

²⁵ Altman, *Film/Genre*, 23.

²⁶ Ibid., 24.

²⁷ For a detailed study of the image of the electric guitar in rock music, see Steve Waksman's *Instruments of Desire: The Electric Guitar and the Shaping of Musical Experience*.

²⁸ Altman, *Film/Genre*, 15.

²⁹ Ibid., 16.

³⁰ Ibid., 19.

³¹ Steve Neale, "Questions of Genre" in *Film Genre Reader II*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 170.

³² Altman, *Film/Genre*, 21.

³³ Steve Neale, "Questions of Genre," 170.

³⁴ Lawrence Grossberg, "Is Anybody Listening? Does Anybody Care? On Talking About 'the State of Rock,'" in *Microphone Fiends: Youth Music, Youth Culture*, ed. Andrew Ross and Tricia Rose (New York: Routledge, 1994), 41.

³⁵ Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (London: Routledge, 1999), 63.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 66.

³⁹ Although Simon Frith is my primary source here, this argument has been invoked by numerous others, John Mundy among them.

⁴⁰ Simon Frith, "'The Magic That Can Set You Free': The Ideology of Folk and the Myth of the Rock Community" *Popular Music*, 1 (1981): 159.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 160.

⁴³ Franco Fabbri, "A Theory of Musical Genres: Two Applications," in *Popular Music Perspectives #1*, ed. David Horn and Philip Tagg (Göteborg: IASPM, 1982), 59.

⁴⁴ David Laderman, *Driving Visions: Exploring The Road Movie* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 19.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 6.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 7.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 8.

⁴⁸ Fabbri, "A Theory," 59.

⁴⁹ Frith, "The Magic," 159.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 164.

⁵¹ Ibid., 167.

⁵² Ibid., 166.

⁵³ Auslander, *Liveness*, 69.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 71

Chapter 2

An Overview of the Rock Film's Evolution

In *Film/Genre*, Rick Altman deals with film genres as processes which evolve under pressures from both the industry and the audience. Neither of these forces can determine the structure of a genre on its own. It is also noteworthy that the amount and types of pressure applied on a particular genre vary over time. In this way genres build upon themselves. Each genre film is able to draw upon each previous genre film, creating a pool of possibilities which come to indicate a certain type of film. Rarely does one film take advantage of all of the features available, but this is not necessary. It is only important that enough of the inner and outer forms are shared between one film and previous films so that they might be identified as parts of the same genre. Genres also quite often develop into forms which do not immediately appear to be very close in design to other, earlier films from the genre. This does not mean that those films belong to separate genres. Rather, the differences between films illustrate the evolving nature of the genre.

A brief history of the rock film will highlight both its evolution and the major themes which have come into focus throughout this progression. The primary focus here will be to cast a light upon the major conjunctions between rock music and film; however, there will also be some reference to the role played by television in relation to the rock film. While it would be possible to present a history of the genre chronologically, dealing with films as they appeared, this is not the most efficient or meaningful route. A strictly chronological cataloging of films would offer little insight

into emerging patterns within the genre as a whole. The approach I will take here, then, will be to examine the early, formative days of the genre, followed by a look at three distinct subgenres which have emerged in the rock film. Within each of these groupings, films can then be dealt with chronologically, establishing particular patterns of evolution within each subgenre. It should be noted that I am not suggesting that these subgenres occur in any sort of distinct chronology in relation to each other. While a general pattern does emerge within the overall rock genre, there is a considerable amount of overlapping between the years dealt with in the various subgenres. I will devote more space in this chapter to my discussion of the era before the rock genre had crystallized, since my discussion of the three subgenres constitutes the content of Chapters 3, 4, and 5.

A new musical form was developing during the 1950s, one which would eventually impact even the venerable form of the film musical. In the same way that film genres evolve, so did rock music, with origins reaching deep into the blues. As the music emerged in the 1950s, first as rock 'n' roll and later as simply "rock," it would become fodder for exploitation by Hollywood. However, the first appearance of rock music in film was due less to a desire to exploit the music for financial purposes (at least less so than the many films which would follow), and more to a desire to represent a particular set of values. Bill Haley and the Comets' 1955 recording of "Rock Around the Clock" was used for the opening of *Blackboard Jungle* (1955) to great effect: "As the New Orleans's red light district tainted jazz, *Blackboard Jungle* cast rock into symbolic, if not real, rebellion."¹ The marriage of the song with the film offered a packaged rebellion to

the teenagers of the day, which they gladly accepted, indicating to producers the power of connecting the two forms of film and rock.

The musical was already a well-established film genre by the mid 1950s. Recalling Rick Altman's suggestion in the previous chapter regarding the evolution of film genres, it seems only logical then that the musical would be likely to assimilate rock music into its repertoire. However, while rock music was quick to appear in the musical, it was never truly assimilated into the form. Though there were occasional exceptions to the rule (*Jailhouse Rock* [1957] being the most obvious, and one which I will return to later), in general, rock music never assumed more than a superficial role in the musical genre. This is not to say that there has been any shortage of rock musicals. Indeed, the musical's reliance on popular music lends itself to the appropriation of rock music in its varying styles throughout the years.

The rock musical does provide an excellent indication of the growing popularity of rock music, as well as the struggle between the music's folk roots and the capitalist machinery of the film industry. For a decade, some of the most significant musicals made featuring rock music were Elvis Presley films. Elvis Presley appeared in his first film, *Love Me Tender* (1956), the year after *Blackboard Jungle* was released. Other films followed (*Loving You* [1957], *King Creole* [1958], *Blue Hawaii* [1961] and more) and Presley did excellent business at the box office, appearing on *Variety*'s list of Top Ten Box-Office Stars seven times between 1957 and 1966. Through it all, however, Presley never became a legitimate movie star in the same way as John Wayne, James Stewart, or even Frank Sinatra, who had many non-singing roles. Presley always remained first and

foremost a music performer. He appeared in films which were meant to make his brand of rebellion palatable not only for the teenagers, but also for the general audience. As such, the films quickly lost any sense of real rebellion and fell into a formulaic trap: “Elvis would sing a number of forgettable tunes, walk through a sappy story, be gentle with children, sultry with women, and firm with men who crossed him.”² The films provided teenagers with a glimpse of their idol, while the watered-down plots and music made Presley that much more acceptable to the parents. Robert Ray suggests that the problem with the films was clear from the start:

With their semi-serious, linearly developed plots, highly choreographed dance numbers, and stylized backgrounds, they represented updated versions of the old-fashioned Hollywood musical whose form had evolved around exactly that kind of Tin Pan Alley song against which Presley’s rock and roll was in revolt. The two forms had nothing in common. Where Tin Pan Alley songs were sophisticated, witty, coolly detached, urbane, polished, and vaguely asexual, rock was primitive, direct, involving, rural, amateurish, and overtly erotic.³

Hollywood tried to meld Presley’s image and music with the musical’s form. They were financially successful, but, as Ray pointed out, there was no new form created, no definitive rock film. All that was achieved was the molding of Presley’s image to fit into an existing form. There was little room for the rebellious ideals of rock in the songs that Presley was singing in his films: “There’s No Room to Rhumba in a Sports Car,” “Do the Clam,” and “Yoga Is as Yoga Does.” These songs were strictly lighthearted material, designed to appeal to Presley’s youthful fanbase in sound, while achieving acceptance from fans of the musical through the lyrical content, not so much by what Presley is singing about, but rather what he is not. Lyrics such as “You tell me just how I can take this yoga serious, when all it ever gives to me is a pain in my posteriors” are hardly

infused with the same sense of anti-social desperation that those of “Heartbreak Hotel” are:

Ever since my baby left me
I found a new place to dwell
It's down at the end of lonely street
At Heartbreak Hotel

For the most part, the Presley films became a model for the rock musical in the years that followed. The extent to which the form of the musical was melded with rock music was often no more than the casting of rock musicians in the films. This was the case with Roy Orbison in *The Fastest Guitar Alive* (1968), The Beatles in the animated feature *Yellow Submarine* (1968), The Who, Eric Clapton, Elton John, and Tina Turner in *Tommy* (1975), Bob Geldof in *Pink Floyd: The Wall* (1982) and Iggy Pop in *Cry-Baby* (1990). Even in the rock musicals where rock musicians were not involved, such as *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1973) and *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975), the use of rock music was often a purely aesthetic and commercial choice, capitalizing on the popularity of the music form, rather than acting in a role where rock ideology exerted pressure and influence upon the themes of the films. Still, the rock musical does indicate the struggle between rock's folk-like origins and the capitalist machinery which was so eager to take advantage of the music's popularity, a theme which would come to hold a major role in the rock genre.

Hollywood paid attention and was quick to capitalize on the success of *Blackboard Jungle*'s successful merger of film and rock 'n' roll. While the musical may have seemed the most logical filmic extension of rock music, it was actually not the most popular format for producers. A virtual onslaught of films featuring rock 'n' roll music

followed *Blackboard Jungle*, though many of these films did not hold themselves to the same high standards that the original had. The films were made purely for the purpose of exploiting the popularity of both the music and the youth rebellion pictures of the time:

Producers of these films believed in being hip only to the extent that they didn't get caught showcasing a singer or group that would be out of style by the time the film was released. Selecting which acts to employ was risky; thus, the wide variety of acts in nearly all the rock movies of this era. If one group's star had fallen by the time of the film's release, then the next might still be on every jukebox in America.⁴

So it was that producers began booking numerous acts to appear revue-like in their films, mirroring, to some extent, the early days of the Hollywood Musical during the late 1920s and early 1930s. Foremost among these producers was Sam Katzman, who immediately took advantage of *Blackboard Jungle*'s popularizing of "Rock Around the Clock" by casting Haley and the Comets in a film titled, in an obvious attempt at exploitation, *Rock Around the Clock* (1956). Other films followed (*Don't Knock The Rock* [1956], *Rock All Night* [1957], *Go, Johnny, Go* [1958]), all using the same formula of presenting as many acts as possible within the confines of some basic plot involving youth rebellion. Despite the foregrounding of the music in these pictures, it should be noted that "the goal, of course, was to lure customers to the box office, *not* the record stores. Producers like Sam Katzman signed name artists with *established* hits to star in their films."⁵ As noted above, a name artist might quickly fade into the background if their next single failed to connect with the public, which is why the films featured numerous artists.

Structured as they are around a virtual parade of musical acts, these films might be seen as a sort of jukebox on film, offering up a variety of the day's most popular acts. Jeff Smith expands upon the particularities of these films:

Working a variation of the backstage musical, the “jukebox” narrative is typically concerned with the problems of putting on a rock ‘n’ roll show in the face of adult opposition to both the new music and the teenage lifestyle. As such, the narrative is to some extent a pretext for a series of musical numbers performed by a variety of singers and musicians. Rock and rollers played alongside crooners and chanteuses in a manner that not only gave the films a broader appeal but also elevated the tastes of teens to that of adults.⁶

David Ehrenstein and Bill Reed agree that the narratives in these films are rarely developed beyond providing some sort of reason for the musical performances to exist:

The sole purpose of movies like *Rock Around the Clock*, and *Go, Johnny, Go* was only to squeeze in as much music as possible into their ninety minutes (or less) of running time – with the “dramatic” filler consisting of such will-o-the-wisp concerns as the havoc wreaked by the teen vamp, a band’s struggle for stardom, or being allowed to attend the big dance.⁷

Despite this lack of integration between the narrative and the music, these films can be seen as crude early examples of the rock film. They foreground the struggle between the ‘real’ kids and the adults’ establishment, even if the music itself acts more as independent musical performances than as integrated pieces of the narrative.

At the same time that rock music was appearing in films, it was also making an impact on television by way of appearances on variety shows such as *The Ed Sullivan Show*, as well as on music shows such as *The Peter Potter Show* (1953-54) and *Upbeat* (1955). When *American Bandstand* was nationally syndicated in 1957, it presented a format based around actual teenagers dancing to the latest hits:

American Bandstand clearly indicated television’s increasingly powerful role in constructing and determining the directions in which youth culture would develop. Though record sales were heavily influenced by the show, it also helped construct the *look* of teenage subculture, not least through its ability to parade fashion and dance before the nation.⁸

John Mundy suggests that the role of American television was important for two reasons in particular:

By parading rock music and its performers before a wider audience, it increased the commercial potential of the record industry by actively promoting its products, often in ways which bordered on the corrupt. However, the fact that rock music was located within the context of 'entertainment' effectively rendered the music 'safe'. The increase in commercial potential was at a price, as whatever potentially distinctive meanings rock 'n' roll may have had transmuted, both musically and ideologically, into pop, incorporated within the mainstream of the entertainment industry.⁹

American Bandstand was only one of the myriad of television programs trying to catch the wave of rock's popularity and others appeared throughout the years with variations on the format. *Shindig!* and *Hullabaloo* took to the air, in 1964 and 1965 respectively, and featured musical acts lipsynching to their current single while professional dancers shook alongside and a small number of teenagers watched from the audience.

If television was playing a role in rendering the music safe by transforming it from rock to pop, film was broadcasting this change loud and clear:

The early stars – Chuck Berry, Bo Diddley, Little Richard, Bill Haley – were, for various reasons, supplanted by the mainstream of pop stars like Connie Francis, Fabian, Bobby Vinton, and Frankie Avalon. The early rock stars all had identifiable personalities, but the new generation seemed to be artificial creations of the record companies, guaranteed to leave no stale aftertaste.¹⁰

The rebellion that rock 'n' roll had once been intertwined with was repeatedly diluted. By the early 1960s, producers had latched onto the popularity of the beach in Southern California and they began producing beach movies, often featuring Frankie Avalon and Annette Funicello. While the setting may have shifted from the streets to the beach, the formula had as well: "rock stars were trundled in for "guest" appearances, Frankie and Annette sang a few cute songs to each other, and adult character actors... were used as

either villainous foils to the teens' innocence or comic relief."¹¹ The biggest change was in the type of performer: pop versus rock. Simon Frith offers an explanation of the difference between the two: "Rock, in contrast to pop, carries intimations of sincerity, authenticity, art – noncommercial concerns. These intimations have been muffled since rock became the record industry, but it is the possibilities, the promises which matter."¹² By the early 1960s the promises were empty indeed. Exploitation by Hollywood had resulted in a formula that won at the box office, but which had also diluted those promises that rock offered. By the late 1960s, the formula was no longer even profitable at the box office and the jukebox narrative all but disappeared from movie theatres.¹³

In the late 1960s the jukebox narrative gave way to another form which was closely related: the compilation score. Like the jukebox narrative, the compilation score also had a tendency to focus upon variety, rather than upon a single group or song. Smith suggests that the reasons behind this variety were similar to those behind the jukebox narrative:

For one thing, the careers of lesser-known artists might be boosted by grouping them together with established stars. In addition, the miscellany of recording artists would give the score and soundtrack album broader appeal by reaching a number of different segments of the music marketplace.¹⁴

Following this, however, Smith aptly notes that "such diversity was especially important in the late sixties when the audience was increasingly fragmented into discrete demographic groups and the charts were splintered by rock's growth into a number of distinct styles."¹⁵ Thus, just as the producers of the jukebox narratives had economic motivations, so did those of the compilation scores. However, the compilation score also put rock music to a more specific use than the earlier films, introducing an important

technique into the genre: the use of music as a way of providing commentary for the images on the screen.

The most successful examples of the early compilation score include *The Graduate* (1967) and *Easy Rider* (1969). Following these films, the compilation score continued to appear, remaining a popular tool, both creatively and economically, for films to this day. The early examples were followed by many others, among them *Mean Streets* (1973), *American Graffiti* (1973), *Fast Times At Ridgemont High* (1982), *GoodFellas* (1990), *Dazed and Confused* (1993), *Forrest Gump* (1994), and *High Fidelity* (2000). What immediately differentiates the style of the compilation score from that of the jukebox narrative is the compilation score's reliance upon non-diegetic music. Whereas the jukebox narrative was most often constructed around some inane plot which was meant to provide the diegetic motivation for the various musical performances, the compilation score dispenses with this drive for motivation almost entirely.¹⁶ Instead, the compilation score uses music to suggest particular ideas about elements within the film:

The consumption of pop music and clothing often work together to create a sense of subcultural identity. When these subcultural markers are widely circulated, they can serve as a quick-and-dirty means of establishing or reinforcing the traits of a character.¹⁷

This is largely the case when The Doors' "The End" plays over the opening credits of *Apocalypse Now* (1979), signifying the state of mind of the film's protagonist, Captain Willard. Similar too is the case of a film like *Forrest Gump*, wherein the music does not so much provide a way of establishing character as it provides a way of establishing a particular scene's placement within a historical timeframe.

The compilation score's use of rock music is often more complicated than just a simple means of establishing character or setting through musical style. Smith suggests that the compilation score functions as a two-tiered system of communication:

On one level, an audience of uninformed viewers may interpret the song as background music pure and simple. As such, they may make judgements regarding the overall style and its appropriateness to considerations of setting, character, and mood. However, an audience of informed viewers will recognize the song's title, lyrics, or performer, and will apply this knowledge to the dramatic context depicted onscreen. In such a way, musical allusion also serves as an expressive device to either comment on the action or suggest the director's attitude toward the characters, settings, and themes of the film.¹⁸

Easy Rider was one of the first films to make extensive (and exclusive) use of rock music on the soundtrack. The soundtrack itself went on to become a popular seller, signaling, along with the soundtrack from *The Graduate*, the era of the rock soundtrack album. While this may be interesting as a historical footnote, I would like to argue that, more important than the economic changes which accompanied the success of *Easy Rider*'s soundtrack, the film played an important role in its demonstration of how to tap into the power of the cultural myths of rock which draw the individual members of an audience together into a group.

There is a definite pattern to be found in the structure of *Easy Rider*. Much of the strength of the approach taken is found in its use of the elements of rock culture which I have already described. The film itself alternates, for the most part, between numerous sequences of Dennis Hopper's Billy the Kid and Peter Fonda's Wyatt/Captain America riding their motorcycles along roads which wind through spectacular landscapes, and sequences of the two characters around campfires at night. The narrative is goal oriented, in that Wyatt and Billy are trying to get to New Orleans, but there seem to be few

obstacles actually in their way. There are only six major sequences linking the road and campfire sections together: the opening drug deal, the farmers outside of California, the hippie commune, the jail sequence where Wyatt and Billy meet George, the southern diner, and the New Orleans sequence. Each of these linking sequences serves to set up the following road sequence. On the road, however, there is no dialogue. And yet, one might argue that these scenes on the road are the sequences which move the film forward. Wyatt and Billy are, after all, trying to get away from California – to Florida, specifically, where they can retire on the money they made in their Californian drug deal. The images of the two of them on the road, as well as the dialogue in the preceding scenes, which consistently serves to get them back on the road, are constant reminders of this goal. But the road scenes do more than just move the plot forward. They comment variously on what has come before and what will come after each sequence, despite the lack of dialogue while on the road. The film makes these commentaries by tapping into the audience's associations with the music and lyrics of the rock songs on the soundtrack. Thus, Steppenwolf's "Born to Be Wild" becomes a rallying cry for a life of freedom, illustrating Wyatt and Billy's goals without requiring any sort of expository dialogue from the characters themselves.

The compilation score differs from the jukebox narrative in terms of its use of generally non-diegetic rock music. Likewise, the rock musical also has a tendency to motivate its performance within the diegesis, and, as such, the rock songs in a compilation score perform differently from those films as well. Finally, the compilation score also differs from the traditional orchestral score of many Hollywood films in that

the rock songs bring with them very different associations than an original orchestral score (or even one which utilizes popular classical music), emphasizing the connection with rock culture/ideology. Regarding the compilation score's use of rock music, Smith states:

The compilation score maintains a rather unusual status in the way it typically serves film music's standard narrative functions. Though the formal autonomy of song structures problematizes certain kinds of audiovisual correspondence, filmmakers could overcome these limitations by using the associational aspects of pop music to cue settings, character traits, and dramatic situations.¹⁹

It is precisely this use of the associational aspects of rock music which the compilation score brought to the rock genre in general, as it evolved into more specific subgenres.

While many producers seemed content to simply continue cashing in on the popularity of the latest groups to make the charts, a new phase of the rock film was about to emerge. Just as the Beatles' music made an impressive impact, so would their image, first with television and then with film. In fact, their image would take on increasing importance as their popularity increased. John Mundy explains:

Whilst the Beatles' music ... was the vehicle of their success, its overdetermining significance lessened as their exposure through film and television increased, as their image assumed increased importance in defining their meaning as cultural icon and commodity.²⁰

The Beatles' television appearances, in conjunction with live appearances, photographs, and their music, introduced their image to the public. Their first film, *A Hard Day's Night* (1964), directed by Richard Lester, took that image and expanded upon it. Unlike the previous rock films, the Beatles did not merely appear in the film to play a song or two and then disappear. Neither did they take on the type of roles that Elvis did, playing everything from a convict to a boxer. Robert Ray discusses these differences further:

A Hard Day's Night differed in every way from Hollywood's idea of a popular movie. It was in black and white. It had no plot to speak of, consisting rather of "a day in the life of the Beatles," incidents and short takes connected only by the energy of Lester's editing. The Beatles did not assume roles, as Elvis had done, but merely played versions, albeit caricatured, of themselves. Much of the dialogue was obviously improvised. And throughout, the movie and its stars displayed a witty irony toward the film's ostensible subject, Beatlemania.²¹

As Thomas Wiener notes, "formula films were made after *A Hard Day's Night*, but the success of the film opened new possibilities for rock movies in which the performers and the music were the subject."²² This would have a great and lasting effect on rock films.

Wiener also suggests a second reason for the importance of *A Hard Day's Night* among rock films. Where previous films had followed a formula not only in their screenplays, but also visually, *A Hard Day's Night* "combined Alun Owen's witty screenplay with the kinetic direction of Richard Lester for an experience with more intelligence and movement than any dozen of the early rock films."²³ *A Hard Day's Night* dispensed with the lame plot in favor of a more rhythmic approach. The film used rock without trying to force it into a form that made it safe for the masses. Rather, it introduced the stylistic innovations of the French New Wave to the American audience: *cinéma-vérité*, jump cutting, hand-held cameras, delirious tracking shots, and rapid kaleidoscopic editing were all used.²⁴ Lester freed rock films to focus on the musicians, using visuals to reveal the performers, rather than trying to hide them within formulaic plots as had been done in the past.

The success of the Beatles' films ensured that other films would follow in their footsteps, in inspiration if not in actual execution. Now, rather than working rock acts into a beach movie plot, films like *The T.A.M.I. Show* (1965), *The Big TNT Show* (1966),

and *Festival* (1967) focused on the acts themselves, giving their running time over to a revue-like procession of acts. The success of the Beatles films, and of those following the films, proved to filmmakers that rock music's ideology and image was strong enough to stand on its own. There was little need to clutter up a film with extraneous plots which worked the musicians into the film in the most ridiculous ways. There was enough interest from the film audience for the filmed representations of the rock ideology, so that became the genre's focus.

As rock music became the thematic focus of the films, three major subgenres developed, which I will label as: the event film, the tour film, and the rise and fall film. Each of these subgenres is distinct, in that they each have their own particular themes which are foregrounded over others. However, there is also a considerable amount of overlap between them, as the ideology of rock is shared among them all. It is the approach to this ideology which differentiates one group from another, and it could be argued that some films might suitably fit in more than one category. I will make note of possible discrepancies where a film's placement might be considered questionable.

The event film is centered around a specific event in time. It is interesting to note that the vast majority of event films are documentaries. These include *Monterey Pop* (1969), *Woodstock* (1970), *Gimme Shelter* (1970), *The Last Waltz* (1978), *The Decline of Western Civilization* (1981), and *Chuck Berry Hail! Hail! Rock 'n' Roll* (1987). The instances of fictional event films are nearly nonexistent, *A Mighty Wind* (2003) being one of the few. It might be argued that *The Blues Brothers* (1980) and its sequel, *Blues Brothers 2000* (1998), both fit in as event films, but I disagree. The event in each of these

films (a benefit concert in the first and a battle of the bands in the second) is not essential to the plot in the same way that the Woodstock music festival is essential to the *Woodstock* film. The Blues Brothers' films are much more closely related to the jukebox narrative, where their inane plot is really nothing more than a way of justifying, no matter how loosely, the films' musical performances.

Just as The Blues Brothers' films do not fit well within the event film, one might argue that *Gimme Shelter* would be better discussed as a tour film. Granted, the first half of the film does document The Rolling Stones' American tour from the east to west coasts. However, the entire film is grounded by the Altamont concert which features prominently in the second half, thus indicating that *Gimme Shelter* is much more of an event film than a tour film. I will return to this film in Chapter 3, but first I would like to provide some general remarks regarding the event film.

The event film perhaps most closely resembles the backstage musical as described by Feuer, at least in the way in which it involves the audience. Whereas the tour film tends to keep the audience at an impersonal distance from the musicians, in the event film the fans often become almost as important as the band. This is perhaps most obviously the case in *Woodstock*, where the musical performances occur in between copious amounts of footage of the fans descending upon the town of Woodstock and the nearby farm where the music festival occurred. Without the fans, this film is nothing more than a document of the actual concert. The footage of the audience elevates the importance of the music, as the fans comment on the festival and the groups involved. Furthermore, there are sequences where some of the town's aging residents are interviewed, but the

topic is not the musicians, but the fans. Interestingly, the residents who are interviewed in the film appear to be genuinely impressed by the behavior of the 'young' music fans, uniting the adults and the youth in a way similar to how the jukebox narrative used rock musicians alongside more adult performers, or the Elvis films watered down the rock music by filtering it through more traditional types of show tunes, in order to be more appealing to the older audience.

Related to the event film is the tour film. Aesthetically, the primary difference between the two is in the structuring of the film. Whereas the event film generally focuses upon a particular, stationary musical event, the tour film tends to be always moving forward across a physical distance. In 1967, D.A. Pennebaker's *Don't Look Back* was released, documenting Bob Dylan's final solo acoustic tour of Great Britain. Like *A Hard Day's Night*, *Don't Look Back* did not try to disguise its star within a Hollywood plot. In contrast to the Beatles' film, however, Pennebaker's was a documentary in the style of *cinéma-vérité*. Though it can be questioned whether or not Dylan was actually being himself or playing a variation as the Beatles had done, what is not in question is that the film portrays the Dylan on screen as the real man. Authenticity would become an important theme in the genre after this. In addition, building upon the initial example of The Beatles and their films, a trend began to emerge where filmmakers began seriously documenting specific rock groups (or performers) and events, as Pennebaker had done with Dylan. Unlike the initial wave of films which came after The Beatles films, these films claimed to do more than to just document a musical performance. The filmmakers were now trying to document the personalities of the musicians and their fans. Among

the films that followed were *Eat the Document* (1972), *This Is Spinal Tap* (1984), *Crossroads* (1986), *Rattle and Hum* (1988), *Truth or Dare* (1991), *Hard Core Logo* (1996), *Jane's Addiction – Three Days* (1997), and *Almost Famous* (2000).²⁵

The tour film, by its very nature, highlights the voyage, emphasizing the mythic importance of traveling to a new place, never being at home. The travelogue nature of these films provides a forward motion for the subjects of the film. Due to the homelessness of the musicians, the fans rarely play much more than a passing role as extras in these films. This is not to say that the fans are unimportant in the tour film, but merely that their roles as characters are limited by the migratory nature of the musicians in these films. When the fans do appear, their role is often designed to mythicize that of the musicians themselves. Jonathan Romney discusses this role further:

Live music documentaries above all continue to affirm the myth of the star as glittering repository for the fantasies of fans struggling under the burden of their own supposedly humdrum existence. A recent example, *The Cure Show* (Aubrey Powell/Leroy Bennett, 1993), opens with panoramic shots of the crowd at a Detroit concert decked out in Goth finery. But, sorry mortals that they are, they are condemned to live out their existence in black and white; their world only explodes into colour when their objects of adoration arrive on stage.²⁶

While not all of the films are quite as heavy-handed in their manipulation of the fans' role in relation to the musicians, the effect is generally the same. In *Ladies and Gentlemen: The Rolling Stones* (1973), the camera is sometimes placed within the crowd, looking up adoringly at the band on stage. Alternatively, the film's audience is at other times invited onto the stage with the camera taking a place just to the side of the musicians. This is all very much related to what Jane Feuer has said regarding the role of the camera in the myth of the audience. Specifically, this suggests the way in which the concert audience

remains in front of the stage, while the film audience may be invited onto the stage through the movement of the camera.

The tour film does not consist of only concert footage. As mentioned in the previous chapter, there is also a concentrated effort by both the filmmakers and the musicians to present the tour as something more than promotion for the group's latest album. Rather, it is often described in much more mythic terms as a journey from, and for, the heart. It is to this end that music is often used in much the same way as it is in the compilation score, providing a commentary for the visuals. I will deal with this in detail in Chapter 4 in a discussion of *Hard Core Logo* and the way in which the song "Who The Hell Do You Think You Are?" functions as the film's identity quest anthem, filling in the holes in the narrative itself.

The third major subgenre of the rock film involves the depiction of the rise and fall of a particular artist, be it a solo performer or a band. It is in this category that we can find the most fiction films, due partly to the fact that the rock biopic tends to follow the pattern of the rise and fall film. Films in this subgenre include *Jailhouse Rock* (1957), *The Harder They Come* (1973), *Stardust* (1974), *The Buddy Holly Story* (1978), *Sid and Nancy* (1986), *La Bamba* (1987), *The Doors* (1991), *That Thing You Do!* (1996), *Velvet Goldmine* (1998), *The Filth and the Fury* (2000), and *Standing In the Shadows of Motown* (2002). Despite the early appearance of *Jailhouse Rock*, this subgenre was relatively slow in appearing. However, during the 1980s this became one of the most popular types of rock film, due no doubt in part to economic reasons where producers saw fit to exploit established (and, in some cases, long departed) acts such as Buddy

Holly, Richie Valens, and The Sex Pistols in biopics. Still, there was no shortage of fictional groups either, as evidenced by films such as *Eddie and the Cruisers* (1983), *This Is Spinal Tap* (1984), *Satisfaction* (1988), and *The Commitments* (1991).

If the tour film is structured largely by a journey across space, and the event film by a metaphorical journey of the mind, then it can be said that the rise and fall films are generally structured around a journey across time. They often begin with the artist before they have achieved any sort of fame. *Jailhouse Rock* is an excellent example of this type of origin, with Presley's Vince Everett emerging (by way of prison) from the working class arena of his fans. *The Filth and the Fury* also demonstrates this approach, dealing with the real life rock band The Sex Pistols, documenting each member's working class beginnings, suggesting that they are somehow more 'real' because of their early experiences.

Similarly, the rise and fall inevitably leads to some sort of downfall. This is not always a complete breakdown, as in the breakup of the band at the end of *The Filth and the Fury*. *Jailhouse Rock* provides an alternative ending where Everett has come to be in awe of his own star power, and ends up in a fight where his larynx is damaged and he must give up singing for a time, allowing him to return to his 'real' self. Of course, the implication is that he will go on to be an even bigger star once his voice has returned and he is truthful to his audience. *Standing In the Shadows of Motown* finds another way around the 'downbeat' ending. After years of toiling in obscurity after the end of their tenure as Motown's house band, The Funk Brothers are given a chance to relive their

glories in a reunion concert, where they perform alongside today's popular stars (again recalling the assimilation of youth and adulthood).

Due to their focus upon both the origin and end of the journey across time, the rise and fall films are often more personal in nature than the other subgenres. The primary theme and ideological underpinning in these films is often the authenticity of the artist's identity. A film like *The Doors* covers Jim Morrison's life from his childhood years up until his death in Paris. An early scene depicts the young Morrison in the backseat of his family's car driving past an accident in the desert. Later, he speaks of the Native-American shaman and his spiritual powers. Throughout the film, several Native-Americans reappear in the background of various sequences, indicating Morrison's connection with their more 'natural' and 'real' way of life. Morrison is shown to be a more natural performer than the others in his band. When death comes to him at the end of the film, one of the Native-Americans appears again, implying that Morrison has joined them in the afterlife. The final sequence in the film is a winding shot through the cemetery in which he is buried, coming to rest upon his graffiti-covered grave, reminding the viewer that the myth of his artistry must be preserved. He is worthy of the audience's adulation. What goes unspoken here is that the man is worshipped in large part because he did die. This is the crux of the rise and fall films: that the artist must not fade quietly away. Rather, they must burn brightly, leaving behind their body of work when they go.

There is often a desire to force film genres into strict frameworks of evolutionary development. This may be an adequate, though still problematic, approach when dealing

with films from a relatively short time period, but it raises a number of problems when discussing the entire timeline of a genre. The rock film did not evolve in a one-way linear direction. There have been steps forward, followed by steps backward. Films released within only a few years of each other might have very little in common, but have many similarities with films from either side of the timeline. There are, however, definite thematic patterns which have developed as the genre has evolved. Specifically, the three subgenres of the event film, the tour film, and the rise and fall film have come into focus within the genre as a whole. While it is difficult to pinpoint an exact date for the emergence of each of these genres, rough developmental periods can be seen in the genre's history. The development of the event film and the tour film largely coincide, though the event film does appear in more numbers slightly earlier than the tour film (*The T.A.M.I Show* [1965], *Festival* [1967], *Monterey Pop* [1969], *Woodstock* [1970], *Gimme Shelter* [1970], and *Let It Be* [1970] for the event film, versus *Don't Look Back* [1967], *Eat the Document* [1972], *Cocksucker Blues* [1972], and *Ladies and Gentlemen: The Rolling Stones* [1973] for the tour film). The rise and fall film, despite the early appearance of *Jailhouse Rock* (1957), was relatively slow in becoming a point of focus for the genre (see *The Harder They Come* [1973], *The Buddy Holly Story* [1978], *Eddie and the Cruisers* [1983], *Purple Rain* [1984], *Sid and Nancy* [1986], and *La Bamba* [1987]).

At this point in time, none of these three subgenres have become extinct, and as such it is difficult to think of the genre in linear terms. We should also remember that none of these subgenres are set in stone. Their borders are continually shifting as new

films alter the generic corpus. At the same time, it is possible that, as the subgenres shift, so might the films within them, especially considering the overlapping nature that already exists for many films. As such, we must always approach generic films from a tentative position, realizing that any discussion of the genre is open to further arguments and interpretations.

¹ R. Serge Denisoff and William D. Romanowski, *Risky Business: Rock in Film* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1991), 12.

² Thomas Wiener, "The Rise and Fall of the Rock Film: Part One," *American Film* 1, no. 2 (November 1975): 28.

³ Robert B. Ray, *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1980*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 164.

⁴ Wiener, "Rise and Fall," 26.

⁵ Denisoff and Romanowski, *Risky Business*, 23.

⁶ Jeff Smith, *The Sounds of Commerce: Marketing Popular Film Music* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 157.

⁷ David Ehrenstein and Bill Reed. *Rock on Film* (New York: Delilah Books, 1982), 17.

⁸ John Mundy, *Popular Music on Screen: From the Hollywood Musical to Music Video*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 188.

⁹ Ibid., 184

¹⁰ Wiener, "Rise and Fall," 28.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Simon Frith, *Sound Effects: Youth, Leisure, and the Politics of Rock 'n' Roll* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), 11

¹³ The occasional film in the style of the jukebox narrative did manage to make it to screen in the years following, perhaps most notably among them being *The Blues Brothers* (1980) and *Blues Brothers 2000* (1998).

¹⁴ Smith, *The Sounds of Commerce*, 158.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ As is often the case, there are exceptions to this rule. *Hard Core Logo* (1996) comes to mind, where a radio plays The Poppy Family's "Which Way You Goin', Billy," providing a commentary upon the situation of guitar player Billy Tallent.

¹⁷ Smith, *The Sounds of Commerce*, 165-166.

¹⁸ Ibid., 167-168.

¹⁹ Ibid., 171.

²⁰ Mundy, *Popular Music on Screen*, 191.

²¹ Ray, *A Certain Tendency*, 270.

²² Wiener, "Rise and Fall," 28.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ray, *A Certain Tendency*, 271.

²⁵ Although there seems to be a considerable gap between 1972 and 1984, there was no shortage of rock films being released during these years. However, many of these films, while documenting live shows, consisted of strictly concert footage. Among these are *Ladies and Gentlemen: The Rolling Stones* (1973), *Rust Never Sleeps* (1979), *Let's Spend The Night Together* (1982), and *Stop Making Sense* (1984). Despite the fact that the footage in these films is often very similar to the live footage in the previously mentioned films, I have intentionally excluded strictly concert films because of their reluctance to assimilate rock music into a narrative form.

²⁶ Jonathan Romney, "Access All Areas: The Real Space of Rock Documentary," in *Celluloid Jukebox: Popular Music and the Movies Since the 50s* (London: BFI, 1995), 83.

Chapter 3

Faces in the Crowd: The Event Film

A primary function of the rock film is to support the ideology of rock music. As such, the audience plays an important role in the genre, since they are central to the ideology of rock. Jon Landau wrote about rock 'n' roll:

[It] was unmistakably a folk-music form. Within the confines of the media, these musicians articulated attitudes, styles and feelings that were genuine reflections of their own experience and of the social situation which had helped produce that experience.¹

That social situation is one that is shared by the fans of rock music. We should recall here Simon Frith's rock-folk argument. Specifically, the argument is based upon the ideas that rock music was constructed as an authentic 'reflection of experience' and as a reflection of the experience of the community.² Landau's work illustrates this supposed connection between performer and audience: "There existed a strong bond between performer and audience, a natural kinship, a sense that the stars weren't being imposed from above but had sprung up from out of our own ranks."³ The audience, then, is integral to the rock genre. There is a difference, however, in the treatment of the fan between the three subgenres under consideration here. It is the relationship of the performer and the fans within the community that is at center stage in the event film. In this chapter I will first make some initial remarks about *Woodstock* (1970) as a film which takes the role of the audience to extreme ends, followed by an examination of *Gimme Shelter* (1970), which also places the fan in a position of much importance. I will then turn my attention to *The Last Waltz* (1978) and the way in which the fans' role is emphasized, even though the audience is largely absent from the film.

Woodstock and Gimme Shelter

In the event film, the fans tend to be at their most visible, partly due to the stationary nature of the films. There is very little travelling, unlike the tour film, and so the fans become more visible. In the tour film, there is still a desire to construct a representation of community, but the physical movement undertaken by the performers precludes the audience from playing a major role in that representation. As such, the tour film tends to focus upon the musicians as an image of the larger community of which they and the audience are all a part. The performers in the tour film will occupy the most important positions. In the event film, however, the fans are just as important as the band, being more visible than in the other subgenres and thus having more influence upon the shape of the films' images of community. J.P. Telotte discusses this increased emphasis upon the audience as it relates to *Woodstock* and *Gimme Shelter*:

The activities of the concert-goers, the non-musical elements of the films, are given a heightened importance, effectively altering or enhancing our response to the music. *Gimme Shelter*, for instance, seeks to place the Rolling Stones' Altamont concert in the context of its original audience's volatile attitude, as it attempts to analyze the violence occurring offstage in light of the Stones' music. *Woodstock*, with its images of flower children, omnipresent peace signs, and show of communal harmony, seems most significant as a record of that generation to which it gave a name. Instead of being played *to* this audience, the music of *Woodstock* almost seems to emanate *from* it.⁴

The fans in the event film act as something of an indicator as to the status of the performers. *Woodstock* is an interesting case, since the only time the musicians appear is when they are on stage. There is no offstage footage of them. That space belongs exclusively to the fans, who assume a role similar to that held by the rock songs in *Easy Rider* (1969). The sequences showing the fans both at and away from the concert serve to

emphasize the authenticity of the musicians onstage. In *Woodstock* the musicians are depicted as authentic through their role as part of the community which is formed by the audience.

Gimme Shelter deals ostensibly with The Rolling Stones during the last two weeks of their 1969 tour of America. It is not, however, a tour film, as the tour itself is overshadowed by the spectre of the disastrous free concert at Altamont, where the Hells Angels murdered one concertgoer and assaulted numerous others. It could be suggested that *Gimme Shelter* calls attention to the manufactured nature of the film by showing the filmmakers in the editing room assembling the film. While this is certainly true in some part, there is another effect of these sequences, achieved in part by including various members of The Rolling Stones in the room, and demonstrated clearly in the first of the editing room sequences. The Stones' drummer, Charlie Watts, looks on confusedly while the filmmakers work, commenting on the difficulty of seeing the raw footage as a finished film. The filmmakers respond by telling Watts that it will take eight weeks before the film is completed. By showing Watts as ignorant to the ways of filmmaking and also having the filmmakers explicitly state that they will be constructing the film over the next eight weeks, the band is absolved from the responsibility of the film. By this I mean that the film is trying to convince us that Watts and the rest of the band are simply musicians and that they will not be performing directly for the camera. The film tells us that the musicians have no knowledge of filmmaking, and so they have no choice but to remain themselves throughout the film. In turn, it is implied that the filmmakers will be there to capture these 'real' people on film. As such, this sequence acts as the

filmmakers' claim as to the authenticity of what is on film. I would suggest that, while the filmmakers may have been consciously attempting to make a self-reflexive commentary upon the filmmaking process, it is this claim to authenticity that is at the heart of the editing room sequences.

The editing sequence is an example of what the rock genre must do in order to assimilate the ideology of rock. The Stones must not appear as calculating in their image, even if they were the ones who commissioned the film originally. This blurring of the Stones' role in the film's technology is largely related to what Jane Feuer says regarding the myth of spontaneity in the backstage musical. Performers fail when they are "unable to render invisible the technology of production in order to achieve the effect of effortlessness by which all entertainment succeeds in winning its audience."⁵ It is to this end that *Gimme Shelter* works to obscure the Stones' participation in the filmmaking process.

The editing room is not the only place where *Gimme Shelter* masks technology in favor of presenting a more organic image of authentic musical creation. In a later sequence, the Stones leave the comfort of a Holiday Inn and drive to the Muscle Shoals Sound Studios in Alabama. On the soundtrack of the sequence is the Stones' version of an old blues song by Mississippi Fred McDowell, "You Gotta Move." While it might be argued, and with some merit, that this particular song was used here simply as a sort of promotional tool for the Stones' *Sticky Fingers*, the album on which the song appears, and which was current at the time of the film's release, that would be to ignore the deeper resonance of the song's role here. At its most basic level, the song has an associative

function, imparting a sort of authenticity upon the Stones that can be difficult for them to achieve on their own. By using a song written by the older bluesman, the Stones stake a claim to a heritage reaching back to a time when record sales were not seen as the ultimate goal for musicians who grew up singing their songs while working in the cotton fields of the southern United States.

The film uses “You Gotta Move” in conjunction with the images of the trip to Muscle Shoals. There is a definite agenda to the depiction of the trip, much as there is in a road film such as *Easy Rider* (1969), where the music expands upon the characters as they ride their motorcycles across the country. It is unnecessary to have any sort of plot development here. Rather, the film is trying to remove the Stones from the trappings of the rock tour. There is an emphasis upon the journey from the civilization of the Holiday Inn, along the open highway past southern fields, finally arriving at the recording studio. While the Stones do this, the business managers and lawyers are left behind to work out the details of putting on the free concert at Altamont. The studio itself is depicted less as a technological playground than as a room in which the Stones are able to capture their musical reflection of community on tape. Rather than a myriad of wires and microphones, we see the Stones listening to the already completed recording of “Wild Horses,” enjoying the song much as their audience would, with closed eyes and heads nodding in time to the music. The intent here is partially, as in the earlier editing room sequence, to mask the technology involved in the recording, but also to separate the Stones from the world of the managers and lawyers. The film depicts the studio as a location far removed from civilization, a destination arrived at only after a long journey

which takes the Stones back to their communal roots with the bluesman of an earlier time, and thus to the ‘people’.

While the editing room and recording studio sequences deal with masking the technology that the film and the Stones rely upon, grounding the band in the spontaneity which represents their success in the eyes of the audience, the fans themselves take on a much more visible role as the setting shifts to the Altamont concert site for the second half of the film. The earlier scenes used the myth of spontaneity to link the Stones with the audience through their communal roots. A.L. Lloyd suggested that these communal roots were the crux of folk music: “the main thing is that the songs are made and sung by men [*sic*] who are identical with their audience in standing, in occupation, in attitude to life, and in daily experience.”⁶ Rock music assumed this attitude as its own, but only through careful manipulation of the performer’s image. Simon Frith states that “the paradox of rock ideology... was that performers’ claims to represent a community... were supported by the marks of their individuality.”⁷ The first half of *Gimme Shelter* obscures the differences between audience and performers by virtually ignoring the audience.⁸ The film sets the band apart from the capitalist trappings of the music industry by placing them in counterpoint to the filmmakers and their technology and the business side of the music industry, allowing the Stones themselves to stand in for the audience as an image of the community at large.

In the second half of *Gimme Shelter*, during the Altamont concert, the division between performer and audience is much more explicit. The stage acts as a physical barrier, the band on one side, the fans on the other. To some extent, the event itself works

to obscure this barrier and the cameras need only capture it as it unfolds. Members of the Hells Angels motorcycle gang were asked to act as security for the concert, but they quickly became drunk and agitated, turning into an angry gang, taking their aggressions out upon the bands (knocking the singer of Jefferson Airplane, Marty Balin, unconscious during their set) and the audience (beating numerous people with weighted pool cues and stabbing one man to death). By the time the Stones take the stage the situation is extremely volatile. The stage swarms with musicians, Hells Angels, and fans, hardly acting as a physical barrier any longer.

What is interesting about the Altamont concert in *Gimme Shelter* is the way that the camera acts to shift the film viewer's allegiances away from the concert audience. As is usual for concert sequences, the camera initially works to integrate the performers with the film audience, thereby blurring the line dividing the musicians from the concert audience. However, as the concert degenerates into a hostile environment, the camera works to detach us from the concert audience while keeping our sympathies with the Stones. Shots from in front of the stage, within the concert audience, become less frequent until they disappear entirely, leaving the camera, and thus the film audience, to view the situation only from on the stage or high up on a tower behind the stage. As the violence increases, the camera begins to focus more upon audience members who are hostile to the Stones themselves. We see Mick Jagger pleading with the crowd to calm down, and then resuming the concert. At this point, rather than focussing upon the people in the audience who are still enjoying themselves, oblivious to the violence in front of the stage, the camera rests upon those who are in tears, and those who are pleading with

Jagger to stop the show. The camera functions to separate the Stones and the film audience from the concert audience. Rather than the myth of integration, here we have the reverse, a myth of disintegration, at least where the concert audience is concerned. As for the film audience, we are placed on the stage next to Jagger. The camera catches the hostility of the Hells Angels and the audience, and we are well aware that the Stones are trying to control the show, but that they are unable. As such, the film's audience remains connected to the Stones, the camera's positioning and the film's editing blurring the distance between us and the Stones, while emphasizing that between the Stones and the concert audience.

Gimme Shelter sets the Altamont concert up as a battle, and it shows the Stones as losing the fight. The final song of the concert, "Street Fighting Man," emphasizes this point. Jagger sings out "what can a poor boy do except sing in a rock n' roll band?" The implication here is that it is the struggle that is important. It does not matter that the Stones lost this round, as long as they absolve themselves from the conflict and return to what they do: play in that rock and roll band. As the film's audience we can only nod our heads in agreement. We have seen Jagger's concern for the audience and, even if that concern is not reciprocated, the myth of integration has been preserved by the film's efforts to blur the division between the musicians and the film's audience. Furthermore, the myth of the audience has also played a role here. As Feuer states: "successful performances will be those in which the performer is sensitive to the needs of his audience."⁹ Again, it matters little that the concert audience is shown to be hostile when

Jagger addresses them. The film has united *us* with the Stones, and together the film audience and the musicians form the image of community.

The final shots of the film illustrate this. The band and their entourage pile into a single helicopter, sitting on each other's laps as it lifts off into the night. This is followed by the dark shapes of the concert goers climbing over the hills surrounding the concert site. It is as though the Stones have just barely escaped with their lives, the hostile, faceless audience chasing after them. The film does not abandon the concert audience, however, returning to them a short time later, now with daylight falling around them. Now the audience clear out of the concert site as the Stones perform "Gimme Shelter" on the soundtrack, reuniting the band with their audience. No longer do the people appear as ghostly shapes chasing after the Stones. Now they are again like the musicians and the film audience. The concert goers have cut their losses from the night before and are now walking away from the battlefield. In the daylight, the people take on the appearance of survivors of some great battle, much as the Stones were cast as in their escape from the concert.

Woodstock provides an example of the importance of the fan in the event film, demonstrating how the audience can combine with the music to influence the image of the performers, upholding the myth of entertainment so as to blur the lines of distinction between performer and fan. *Gimme Shelter* goes even further in emphasizing the importance of the fan to the image of community, even when the fans are invisible, as in the first half of the film, or when the concert audience is used as a means of masking the lines of difference between the performers and the film's audience.

The Last Waltz

Martin Scorsese's *The Last Waltz* is seemingly a film documenting The Band's 1976 farewell concert. However, the film does much more than to simply present an unbiased document of a particular event. Instead, what Scorsese does is to intertwine concert footage with interviews with the members of The Band in a number of locations for a very specific effect. The overall effect of Scorsese's approach is to illustrate the importance of authenticity for The Band. This emphasis upon authenticity is achieved through Scorsese's use of filmic techniques which both highlight particular moments on and offstage, and draw associations between the music and nonmusical themes, specifically the role of community and the journey in *The Last Waltz*. Where *Gimme Shelter* hinted at the journey through the Muscle Shoals sequence and in the Stones' escape from Altamont, *The Last Waltz* makes the journey an explicit part of its narrative through dialogue and visuals. Of course, the stationary nature of the concert means that the journey here is something of metaphorical one, rather than the physical journey which the tour film relies upon.

The Last Waltz makes two strong statements about The Band and their music before the opening credits roll. The film fades in on a scene of bass player Rick Danko at a pool table. Scorsese's voice then chimes in from off screen asking about the game. Danko explains that he is playing cutthroat, and that the object is to keep your balls on the table while knocking everyone else's off. Immediately, the film suggests to the viewer that Danko and his bandmates are living in a dangerous world, that rock music is a kill or be killed business in which the musicians are in a constant state of struggle.

At the end of this scene, the sound of a cheering audience fades in on the soundtrack and the film cuts to Winterland concert hall where The Band performed their farewell concert. The Band walk out onto the stage to play a number. During the actual concert performance, this was the final number played by the group, who returned to the stage when it became apparent that the audience was not leaving. Here, however, Scorsese has chosen to include it as the first performance within the film and only the second scene. This performance accomplishes several goals, all of which are interconnected.

The placement of this performance emphasizes the effectiveness of Robertson's words as the musicians return to the stage: "You're still here, huh? We're gonna play one more song and then we're gonna go." Following Danko's previous comments about cutthroat, Robertson's words place the group in respect to their audience. The film clearly demonstrates The Band's appreciation for their audience as the group perform this last number as a sort of reward for those fans who have shown their own love and appreciation for the group by remaining in the concert hall rather than filing out as the show ends. This recalls Feuer's suggestion that a successful performance can only take place when the performer's manipulation of the audience is successfully obscured: "The insensitive performer... attempts to manipulate his audience."¹⁰ In the case of The Band, not only are the musicians aware of their fans, but they are also willing to stand alongside them in an 'us against them' struggle, 'them' being the world outside of the concert hall and 'us' being the musicians and the concert audience, once again recalling the community at the root of Frith's rock-folk ideology: "in people's music there were no

stars or hits, no distinctions between performers and audiences.”¹¹ Of course, the nature of the rock film is to include the film’s viewers in the same group as the musicians and the concert audience as well.

This connection between performer and audience is further extended by the song itself: a cover of Marvin Gaye’s “Don’t Do It.” It is here that we find a highlighting of the inherent tension and contradiction that is a part of rock, both in music and in film. It is, as Frith suggests, the individuality which supports the performer’s claims to represent a community.¹² While The Band claim to be on the side of the audience, and the film generally sets them up as so, the fact remains that there is a dividing line between the two groups, both physical and metaphorical, with the musicians occupying the stage and the audience the space in front of it. As such, the relationship between the two groups is somewhat tenuous. It is by choice that the audience are there in the first place, and it is also by desire that they give their attention to the performers. The Band are well aware of this, and this song is a fitting summary of and introduction to the heart of *The Last Waltz*: that the musical journey is a struggle that is always teetering on the brink of destruction, of loss, and of failure. While the lyrics of “Don’t Do It” are written from the singer to his lover, in the hands of The Band the song becomes an impassioned plea to the audience: “Don’t you do it, don’t you break my heart... My biggest mistake was loving you too much!” As Danko and Helm shout this out together, we become aware of just how unstable the relationship between the performers and the audience really is. The tastes of the public are fickle and, despite their popularity during the performance, The Band might fall out of favor with their audience at any moment. And they know it, too. In fact,

with this song and this film, the group admit that the only real power which they hold is the choice of when to walk away. Even this might be lost if they wait too long and their audience disappears. Then there will be no one left to walk away from. And so they plead with their fans not to break their hearts, to let them finish what they began so many years ago.

Following the opening sequences, the film cuts to a room with a couple of couches where Scorsese interviews Robertson on camera, looking back at the farewell concert. Again the time line is manipulated, allowing the participants to provide a commentary to the finished event. The interview here is very informal, with Scorsese acting out the role of an adoring fan (which, to some extent, he was) as he asks questions and chats with Robertson. Scorsese's persona here works well as a bridge for the film viewer, allowing us to take part in an informal discussion with the object of the film's desire, Robertson. Hanging behind Robertson is a large Canadian flag, reminding viewers of The Band's origins (all are Canadians but Helm, who hails from Arkansas) and, more importantly, that The Band are well aware of where they have come from. Their origins have not been obscured by their success. The scene is lit by sunlight streaming through a window behind Scorsese, which leaves the filmmaker in little more than a silhouette while lighting Robertson in a dusk-like way. A large rubber tree encroaches into Robertson's space, giving an earthlike atmosphere to the proceedings, while also recalling the authenticity that comes with an association with nature in road films such as *Easy Rider*, or in *Don't Look Back's* (1967) footage of Bob Dylan performing in a field.

Robertson's words throughout this interview provide an overview of *The Last Waltz*. He tells that The Band were together on the road for sixteen years, half of which were spent playing in dives and roadhouses. Then they performed their farewell concert and retired from the road. To hear Robertson tell it, it sounds like those sixteen years were a hard fought war and that they finally escaped, even earned the right to escape, with their lives. Interestingly, there is never any mention of The Band actually breaking up. The idea was merely for them to get off the road and return to making music, removing themselves, as *Gimme Shelter* did with the Stones during the Muscle Shoals sequence, from the capitalist motivations of the touring entity.

In the second half of this segment, the discussion turns to the concert itself. Robertson admits that the group wanted it to be more than just a concert. They wanted it to be a celebration and to this end they did two things. First, they returned to Winterland, the place where the musicians played their first concert together as The Band (they had existed for many years before that under various other monikers). The recognition of this fact demonstrates the importance that they, and the film, place on tradition. Only by embracing tradition can the performer create the illusion that they are, despite their success, still a part of the community which gave birth to them and their music. This is furthered by Robertson's suggestion that the friends they invited to play with them are among the greatest influences on music, a claim that implies that these people are in part responsible for The Band. These guest performers allow The Band to assume the role of the fan, obscuring the difference between them and their audience.

The first of the guest performers, Ronnie Hawkins, again emphasizes the importance of tradition, since it was with Hawkins that The Band began their career, as The Hawks, in Canada. Furthering this idea, the song they play is “Who Do You Love?” with which they had a minor hit in their early days. The connection between Hawkins and The Band is strong within the film. Hawkins makes numerous references to the various members while singing, and there is rarely a shot of Hawkins on his own. The camera tends to capture him with either Robertson or Danko (and sometimes with both at the same time). Even during Robertson’s guitar solo Hawkins remains in the frame, watching with enthusiasm as Robertson plays, conferring a sort of respect upon Robertson as the old master watches, similar to the association *Gimme Shelter* set up between the Stones and the old bluesmen through the Muscle Shoals sequence.

It is significant that the next performance is again The Band alone on stage. As important as it is for musicians to pay the proper respect to their forebears, it is just as important, if not more so, for them to also have their own identifiable image and sound. Without their own personality, they would simply be riding on the success of the work of others. What the placement of this performance suggests, however, is that The Band did begin somewhere (with Hawkins in Canada), but that they developed their influences and built something unique (on their own in America). What the interviews and guest performers (and the Canadian flag, to some extent) do is to suggest that the musicians remember where they came from and that they still have a healthy respect for those who helped them.

The next sequence I will discuss ties two performances together with an interview. These three scenes in conjunction highlight the essentialness of the journey to the music and the film. Here The Band return to the stage, performing “Up On Cripple Creek.” The song’s lyrics immediately emphasize both the journey and the struggle inherent in that journey:

When I get off of this mountain, you know where I want to go?
Straight down the Mississippi River, to the Gulf of Mexico.

Then the chorus reminds us that it is not an easy thing to undertake this journey, that it is very possible that the traveler will be injured in the process:

Up on Cripple Creek she sends me
If I spring a leak she mends me.

While the song itself presents a sense of struggle and wanderlust, it does not act alone. The visual here supports the song. Here, Helm is the main singer and the camera has to crawl past Danko to capture Helm singing behind his drums. Even when Helm is in view, he is still obscured in part by the drum kit, yet the camera cannot get any closer.

The film continues this theme in the following interview segment, cutting to a shot of Robertson, Danko, and Manuel sitting on yet another leather couch, this time in a room lit only by a single light behind them. Now Robertson says “we didn’t know where we were going. We didn’t know what it was, but for some reason it seemed like a good idea.” He is telling a story about a trip where they ended up playing at Jack Ruby’s club. There is a confirmation that, not only were The Band on a journey here, but also that it is a dangerous journey. Scorsese drives this point home by following the story with another

performance, this time of “The Shape I’m In,” where Manuel sings of just that, tying together the performance of “Up On Cripple Creek” with the story of Jack Ruby’s club:

Out of nine lives, I spent seven
Now, how in the world do you get to Heaven
Oh, you don't know the shape I'm in.

Returning to Robertson, Danko, and Manuel, the three of them perform what the film suggests is an impromptu performance of “Old Time Religion” with guitar, harmonica, and fiddle. This is country music at its rawest. There are no slick edges here, just out of tune, mumbled voices and plenty of smiles from the three performers. As they end, though, Robertson reminds us of the film’s purpose when he says “it’s not like it used to be.” Scorsese takes this opportunity to again make us feel as though the end of the journey is closing in on these men, inserting The Band’s performance of “The Night They Drove Ol’ Dixie Down,” a song that is built on the tragic side of things not being what they used to be.

Another interview now reaffirms The Band’s nature as fighters. The scene begins with a picture of New York City at night. There are a number of spotlights cast upon the picture, so as to suggest both the beauty and the mythic nature of the city. The camera then tilts down and zooms out to reveal Robertson and Helm sitting in front of the picture. Helm starts this story: “It’s kind of hard to take the first time. You have to go there about two or three times before you can fall in love with it.” Then Robertson takes over, alluding to the naiveté of The Band on their first trip to New York when they stayed in a hotel in Times Square because they thought it was conveniently located in downtown Manhattan. Helm recalls New York “an adult portion,” going on to say “it took a couple

of trips to get into it. You just go in there the first time and you get your ass kicked and you take off. As soon as it heals up you come back and you try it again. Eventually, you fall right in love with it.” As in *Gimme Shelter*, it is vital to the group’s existence that they be in a constant struggle to achieve success. The film keeps returning to this idea, both in the present and in stories about the past, because once success has been achieved, the line dividing the performer and audience becomes nearly impossible to obscure. By setting the group up as fighting their way towards the top, the film can keep the performers rooted in the community that includes the audience.

Significantly, the first of the interviews to involve all five members of The Band at the same time works hard to dispel any notion that the members are out to achieve financial success. The film would have us believe that for them, the motivating factor has never been anything less than musical transcendence. Scorsese begins by asking them why they shied away from publicity at the beginning of their career as The Band. Hudson responds that it was just part of a lifestyle that they got to love, where they would chop wood, fix the screen door on the house, and get the songs together, reminding us that these are authentic individuals who live alongside their audience, chopping the same wood, and fixing the same screen door. In *The Last Waltz*, The Band are set up as a direct image of the community they claim to represent.

Scorsese then turns the conversation to women and the road and Manuel immediately suggests that women are the reason for being on the road. The overall picture that is painted here is that the road is a difficult place, and the musicians must find their own reasons for going out there. Manuel ends the segment by saying “I just want to

break even,” reminding us that, while the road might bring with it some joys, it is still a road that leads only to an end.

The second interview to feature the entire band takes place in a kitchen. There is a red light in the window, bringing with it associations to red light districts and, as becomes apparent as the scene progresses, blood and death. The Band tell a story, almost communally, though Robertson does seem to take the lead, of a meeting with the late blues harp player Sonny Boy Williamson. While playing the harmonica, Williamson was spitting blood in a can. Before The Band and Williamson could record anything together, Williamson passed away. Again, this scene gives presence to the pressing nature of this journey that is undertaken in music, tying together several themes which run through the rock genre. We have a group who are on a journey, heading towards a destination which is not important as long as they never reach it. Furthermore, the myth of integration comes into play as the young upstarts again achieve a certain respect through their jam session with the old bluesman who is, like The Band claim to be, a direct representation of the community from which he emerged. This idea is directly linked with the idea of community inherent in the rock-folk argument: The Band were able to crossover with one of their idols, suggesting that there is no dividing line between fan and performer. Finally, the myth of spontaneity plays a role here, since the jam with Williamson was a spontaneous event which, due to Williamson's death, can never be manipulated to any financial gains. The music must remain, as much early folk music did, in the realm of the community who were involved in its production.

Danko takes Scorsese on a tour through Shangri-La, The Band's clubhouse where

they get together to make music. Danko informs Scorsese that the house was once a bordello, recalling that red light in the kitchen during the earlier scene. The two of them make their way into the studio control room where they sit and Scorsese asks Danko what he is doing now that the last waltz is over. Danko does not answer immediately. He first reaches over the console and starts the playback of a piece of music, before putting his hat on. The music begins, a slow, arpeggiated guitar part playing over the scene. Finally, Danko responds to Scorsese's question: "Just making music, you know. Trying to stay busy." Danko's voice begins singing on the song: "I want to lay down beside you. I want to hold your body next to mine." This is what Danko wants, but now that The Band are off the road, there is a sense that he is on his own here, that there is nowhere left to go. The Band cannot exist now that they have withdrawn from the struggle that previously drove them on. The film seems to confirm this as the camera zooms in on Danko's face, hidden beneath the black shadows of his hat. While with The Band on stage, he was a lively personality, here he has become a faceless character whose existence is uncertain. Danko's song continues as the shot cuts to Robertson saying that they never would have gotten into the business if it weren't for the music's ability to take them different places, better places, again suggesting the importance of the journey. Only through a desire to reach someplace else can The Band come to represent the community from which they emerged.

Perhaps the most chilling scene comes immediately following the end of "I Shall Be Released." The film cuts to Robertson as he lists off a number of dead rock musicians and then pronounces that "it's a Goddamn impossible way of life." Throughout this

segment, the sound of the crowd applauding the performers continues, implying that the life is impossible because those in the spotlight are there precisely because they give up part of themselves to the crowd. Greil Marcus suggests that “an identity comes into being that transcends individual personalities, but does not obscure them – in fact, it is the group, sometimes only the group, that makes individuals visible.”¹³ As this identity crystallizes, it becomes that image that the audience desires. The individual personalities lose their appeal, except within the confines of the group. It is this loss of identity which the film has The Band fighting against. In the eyes of the audience, they have become The Band. Success has been achieved. Only by leaving that success behind and starting over can the journey continue. It is to this end that the film works to separate the personalities, allowing Danko to make his music without The Band, beginning his own journey.

There are particular themes which recur in the rock genre. These themes are numerous, but interrelated. A struggle of some sort is inherent within the genre, often placing the musicians and the audience together as one community which must struggle against someone. Frith suggests that this struggle exists because “the music created its community by keeping other people out, and the resulting community was transient – people grew up, tastes changed, real friends and relations were elsewhere, at home and work.”¹⁴ This someone who is kept out is often the capitalist establishment, the money men who are necessary to the existence of a rock band, but whom are not welcomed into the community at large. *Woodstock* presents an idealized version of this community, in large part because it does not give the performers a chance to speak for themselves,

instead casting them in light of the interviews with the fans. However, the relationship between performers and fans is often more problematic than *Woodstock* implies. As Frith says, this community is transient and so there is a constant struggle by the performers to remain a part of it. *Gimme Shelter* and *The Last Waltz* both demonstrate how this communal relationship can be fractured at times. Still, the ideological purpose of this fracture is often related to the purpose of the community in the first place: to uphold the authenticity of the musicians and their music.

¹ Jon Landau, *It's Too Late to Stop Now*. (San Francisco: Straight Arrow, 1972), 130.

² Simon Frith, "'The Magic That Can Set You Free': The Ideology of Folk and the Myth of the Rock Community" *Popular Music*, 1 (1981): 159.

³ Jon Landau, *It's Too Late*, 21.

⁴ J.P. Telotte, "Scorsese's 'The Last Waltz' and the Concert Genre" *Film Criticism*, Vol IV #2, 11.

⁵ Jane Feuer, "The Self-reflective Musical and the Myth of Entertainment," in *Genre, the Musical: A Reader*, ed. Rick Altman (London: BFI, 1981), 165.

⁶ A.L. Lloyd, *Folk Song in England* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975), 346.

⁷ Frith, "The Magic," 164.

⁸ The exception to this comes during the performance clips, where the camera functions ideologically to include the film's audience in the performance. See the discussion of Jane Feuer's myth of integration in Chapter 1, pages 19-20 for more.

⁹ Feuer, "The Self-reflective Musical," 168.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Frith, "The Magic," 162.

¹² Ibid., 164.

¹³ Greil Marcus, *Mystery Train: Images of America in Rock 'n' Roll Music*, (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1982), 44.

¹⁴ Frith, "The Magic," 166.

Chapter 4

On Down the Road: The Tour Film

The ideology of the rock film is structured around the authenticity of the artists. This is true throughout the entire genre. The most obvious differences between the tour and event films concern the use of the journey as a narrative device and the performer's relation to their audience. Whereas the physical journey in the event film is generally quite static, allowing a more metaphorical journey to take center stage, in the tour film the participants are physically displaced from their homes. This homelessness is of key importance in the tour film, as the voyage becomes the focus, rather than a single event. The constant forward motion in the tour film makes it considerably more difficult for the fans to become a driving force in the films in the same way that they do in *Woodstock* (1970), *Gimme Shelter* (1970) or *The Last Waltz* (1978). This is not to say that the fans are nonexistent in the tour film, just that there is a very distinct line that exists between the performer and the fan in these films, since the focus is upon the band who are constantly moving onto the next town and the next show. We most often see the fan as little more than a face in the crowd at the performances. This is true to some extent of *Gimme Shelter* and *The Last Waltz*, but the fans in both of those films are similar to those in *Woodstock* in the way that the performer's relationship with the fans is in large part responsible for the performer's authenticity. This is not a foreign concept to the tour film, but the relative invisibility of the fans here means that the authenticity of the performers must be developed by their relationships to each other much more than to their fans. Greil Marcus has written that community may only be a projection of comradeship.¹ In the tour film then, comradeship must be established in order for an image of community to be

projected. Marcus has also identified a problem with the musical group as an image of community: that each of the band members contribute to an identity which has something of them in it, but which is not their own.² This new identity belongs to the band, not to the individual members. To this end, the journey in the tour film often takes on the shading of a quest for identity by the artists. In this chapter, I will discuss the identity quest as a search for community (and thus authenticity) in *Hard Core Logo* (1996). The film will also serve as a point of discussion regarding the integration of the theme with the music. The second half of the chapter will deal with the possibility of variances within subgenres of the rock film, drawing examples from *Don't Look Back* (1967), and, to a larger extent, *Rattle and Hum* (1988) and *Truth or Dare* (1991).

Hard Core Logo

Bruce McDonald's *Hard Core Logo* depicts the title band's five-city reunion tour across Canada. Very briefly, *Hard Core Logo* is the name of a fictional punk band. Five years after breaking up, the band reunites for a benefit concert. One show turns into five more and the band hits the road. It is not long before old wounds are reopened and the band comes to an end once more after their final performance. Driving the plot is an identity quest for each of the four band members.

Joe Dick is the singer, determined to recover his past identity as the vocalist for *Hard Core Logo*. The biggest obstacle in Joe's path is the guitarist, Billy Tallent. Billy has left behind the anger that Joe still thrives on, finding a new home as the guitarist in Jennifur, a 'big time' band in Los Angeles. *Hard Core Logo* is completed by the schizophrenic bassist, John Oxenberger, and Pipefitter, the drummer who is having one "last tango before a life spent as a garbage man." The identity quest theme is supported

by each of the four characters, but the film is centered on the Joe Dick/Billy Tallent relationship.

As Hard Core Logo's wordsmith/figurehead, Joe Dick is the most visible proponent of the identity quest. It is fitting that it is through words, both spoken and sung, that Joe illustrates the film's theme. These words often run parallel to the visuals. In the opening sequence, where Joe explains the philosophy of Hard Core Logo, Joe and John are interviewed in front of a graffiti covered wall. Intercut with this are a number of title cards. Of most concern to us is the spot where Joe says "the punk rock hard core logo... is like fuck you and that's exactly what we were all about: fuck you." As the statement ends, a title card appears with a quote from Joe: "we'll never sell out." Here the sound and the visuals are working in concert, allowing for the construction of an image of Joe's identity as being intimately linked with that of the band. Everything that Joe says is an indication of his having no identity outside of Hard Core Logo. Writing about The Band, Greil Marcus states:

What mattered most... was that they had put in their years together, as a group. A rock 'n' roll group is a banding together of individuals for the purpose of achieving something that none of them can get on their own: money, fame, the right sound, something less easy to put into words. But what begins as a marriage of convenience sometimes takes on its own value. An identity comes into being that transcends individual personalities, but does not obscure them – in fact, it is the group, sometimes only the group, that makes individuals visible... Groups are images of community.³

Thus, when Joe Dick says that the whole band playing together is "different" from what he can do on his own, he is saying that Hard Core Logo are a representation of the community, rather than being simply four people up on stage. They are one being when they play together, and, according to Joe, their audience understands that. If Joe is to

retain his authenticity, then, he must exist within the confines of the band. He must be Joe Dick, Hard Core Logo's singer.

While Joe's identity quest is explicitly stated, tied as it is to the band as a whole, Billy Tallent's is more subtle, if only due to his less verbal nature. Torn between the stability and success of Jennifur and his past loyalties to Joe and the others, Billy chooses to do the reunion tour and then leave Hard Core Logo permanently. This inability to make a clean cut from his old band results in Billy losing the job with Jennifur. One scene in particular stands out as an aural confirmation of the theme. After the show in Regina, Billy and Joe are in a small diner. Joe, unaware that Billy is no longer with Jennifur, says that there will be no problem if he plays with both Jennifur and Hard Core Logo. Billy does not respond to Joe's statement, giving no indication as to whether he will remain with Joe or move on and find yet another band. While Joe and Billy converse, we hear a female voice singing "which way you goin', Billy." These lyrics underscore the identity quest by emphasizing the fact that, whether he makes it or not, Billy has a choice that Joe does not. Billy is a guitarist, so, unlike Joe, it is relatively easy for him to leave the past behind and move on to a new band. In contrast, Joe's identity is built on his words, which are in turn tied to everything that Hard Core Logo ostensibly stands for. If Joe leaves the past behind, then he is left without an identity, saying in essence that Hard Core Logo was never real. Billy has the opportunity to leave the band without 'selling out' because he has not linked himself, through words, to any explicit rock ideology.

The identity quest itself is propelled forward by the group's journey across western Canada. Throughout the film there are numerous shots of the road (actually a barrel painted to look like pavement with a yellow line down the center). Occasionally,

the yellow line veers to the right and left of the road, wildly out of control, reminding the viewer that the musicians are both constantly moving forward and are themselves not in control of their path. While the implication of this erratic movement is that the band will have a difficult time reaching the end of their journey, we should recall David Laderman's suggestion, outlined in Chapter 1, that the journey itself is of more importance than the ultimate destination.⁴ It is of little consequence whether or not the end is reached, so the more difficult the journey, the better. Furthermore, it is also important to remember that the rock film's desire for authenticity is in large part achieved by placing the performers in opposition to less-authentic groups (for example, other performers, managers, producers, etc.). The chaotic road traveled by Hard Core Logo then stands as a representation of those forces which have been aligned against the band.

The search for identity works well as a part of the touring film. The very nature of the rock tour foregrounds this quest. When the four members of Hard Core Logo reunite and take to the road, they leave their homes behind, staying in motels, constantly moving towards the next show, all the while trying to forge an identity together as a group while keeping their individual identities. The theme is well-supported by the music in the same way in which music works in a compilation score such as *Easy Rider* (1969). The plot of a tour film is dictated in large part by the road, and specifically by a drive to reach a particular destination, usually home (or at least the point where the musicians can pause their journey and collect themselves for a time). Due to the transitory nature of the tour, however, these films are often picaresque in nature, dealing with a number of sequences linked together rather than a typical Hollywood plot. This is where the music, both

diegetic and nondiegetic, uses, as Jeff Smith suggests, “the associational aspects of pop music to cue settings, character traits, and dramatic situations.”⁵

One song in particular assumes the burden of developing *Hard Core Logo*’s theme, becoming in effect an identity quest anthem. “Who the Hell Do You Think You Are” appears as the primary soundtrack in three different scenes, as well as appearing as a part of a medley in a fourth, related scene. It should be noted that the source recording is the same each time the song appears. There is no variation either time the song is played on stage. Thus, the recording itself can have only the meanings which are implicit within its lyrics. However, when combined with the visuals, the song acquires narrative associations which affect our response to the scene in question. In turn, these responses become part of the narrative association the next time the song appears, altering the meaning of the song, thereby resulting in a new response.

The first time we hear “Who the Hell Do You Think You Are,” during the band’s reunion performance, the song rings out as a unifying call-to-arms for the band, a proclamation of their collective identity. This unification is visualized just prior to the band taking the stage, when they form a circle and join hands while an off screen voice introduces them: “Breaking five years of silence, Vancouver’s favorite bad boys of punk... Hard Core Logo!” A division exists between band and audience, with the former looking down on the latter. This collectivity continues and is reinforced as they take the stage and Joe spits out his opening words, further setting the band against the audience: “You don’t know shit from good chocolate, babies!” Joe implies that while the audience do not know the difference, he and the rest of the band certainly do. The music begins and Joe kisses both Billy and John on the cheek, once more emphasizing the close

connection between the members, before launching into the vocals. Now, when Joe screams out the chorus, “who the hell do you think you are,” the words are aimed directly at anyone who is not a part of the band. Arguably, the most vivid example of the shared identity comes when Joe and Billy take turns spitting at each other, opening their mouths to willingly accept the exchange of fluid. A strange sight, and one that certainly separates them from their audience. All in all, this performance sets the band up as a unified identity which will be stripped away throughout the rest of the film, leaving each character to fend for themselves on their own identity quests.

The next sequence of concern comes immediately after documentary-like testimonials from each member about the initial breakup of the band. We cut to inside the van, looking forward out the front window. John is driving and Pipefitter is asleep in the passenger’s seat. Joe leans forward into the frame and puts a bootleg of the reunion performance into the tape deck. What we hear next is familiar: the previously heard sound of Joe Dick abusing the audience. We expect this to be followed by the beginning of “Who the Hell Do You Think You Are.” Instead, we get the jarring, screeching sound of the tape jamming and Joe swearing. This is a powerful thematic moment, even though the song never begins. In fact, it is the unfulfilled promise of the song that gives the scene its impact. After Hard Core Logo’s initial recapture of their glory days, the jammed tape serves to remind the viewer that those days are already over. We had expected to hear the tape as another affirmation of the band’s united identity, but instead we realize that what we initially thought to be a united front was really only the beginning of the identity quests. This failed attempt at a second call-to-arms splinters the band into four individual personalities once more. We become vividly aware that, although Joe acts as the center of

the group, his entire identity hinges upon Billy's involvement. In opposition, Billy loses his gig with Jennifur, yet refuses to tell Joe, a symbolic act that is an attempt to retain and develop his own identity, remaining separate from the subordinate identity that Joe has in mind. We might say that the sound of the bootleg tape jamming is also the sound of the band's relationship and identity being jammed up.

When the tape jams, the unification process is halted, becoming stagnant. The separate identities swell and bulge within the structure of the group, until the moment when they can no longer be held in check. This moment comes in the van, in the pre-dawn, with Joe driving, John in the passenger's seat, and Billy and Pipe in the back. John's words are the catalyst for the uncorking of the individual identities, as he stares into a small, distorted mirror and diagnoses each member's dishonesty. He announces that Joe would be nowhere without Billy, and that if Billy was honest he would admit to Joe that the Jennifur gig had been canceled. The soundtrack becomes a layer of voices, with Joe and Billy bickering, and Pipe yelling at John. This is followed by John staring blankly into the mirror, screaming, and then bashing his head into the side window. We then hear the now distinctive sound of the bootleg tape becoming unstuck and "Who the Hell Do You Think You Are" begins. The resumption of the tape coincides with the unplugging of the band's identity problems. Everything floods out during the following shot, with the band on the side of the road at dawn and "Who the Hell Do You Think You Are" muffled from within the van. The dialogue here is very much a distillation of what was said inside the van, only with Joe as the speaker this time. As the voices fall into silence, we are left with the song's chorus ringing out in the dawn: "who the hell do you think you are?" Indeed, we have just been told who each of these men really are.

By the time of its last appearance, “Who the Hell Do You Think You Are” has been infused with numerous narrative associations. When we hear it for the last time, during the band’s Edmonton performance, the song is no longer a sign of a united front within the band. Rather, it is accusatory to the last. Before detailing the reasons for this change in meaning, we must consider the moments immediately prior to this final performance of the film’s identity quest anthem. In the dressing room before the show, Joe learns that Billy has been reinstated in Jennifur and will be leaving Hard Core Logo after this final show. A fast zoom in on Joe’s face is accompanied by the off screen question “how do you feel about Billy leaving Hard Core Logo?”. There is a moment of silence as the camera lingers on Joe’s stunned expression, followed by a cut to the band on stage. Joe answers the question in song, shouting out the chorus to the first song of the medley: “rock and roll is fat and ugly, rock and roll is fat and ugly.” Everything that Joe has said previously is rolled up into that statement. Billy is going off to Los Angeles to play in a ‘big time’ rock and roll band, and Joe hates everything about it.

The next song in the medley eradicates any questions as to whether or not Joe will try to convince Billy to stay. During “Edmonton Block Heater,” Joe sings “she’s been so good to me, she’s always there for me throughout the day.” As the words come out, Joe holds a hand up to Billy, indicating that Billy has not been there “throughout the day.” Rather, Billy has betrayed Joe.

The third song is the identity quest anthem, picking up at the guitar solo. This time, Joe does not dance to Billy’s playing, but instead stands motionless, drinking a bottle of whiskey. Joe then turns, and while Billy has his head down, spits on the guitarist. The difference between this performance and the first one is immense. Whereas

Billy previously welcomed Joe's spit as a sign of the intimacy between the band, this time Joe spits on Billy as a sign of contempt. Billy is given no choice in the matter, since Joe spits while Billy's head is down. Another difference between the two performances concerns the positions of Joe and Billy on the stage. In the first performance, Joe and Billy gladly shared a microphone for the chorus. This time, when Billy gets close enough to sing into Joe's mike, Joe rams his shoulder into Billy, physically separating himself from Billy. When Joe shouts "who the hell do you think you are," the question is directed not at the audience, but towards Billy Tallent.

There is one final song in this medley, acting as a sort of summation of Joe Dick's feelings towards Billy. In "Something's Gonna Die Tonight," Joe sings:

Ah, but what do you do, man
 If you get beat up and your heart's crushed in
 And ya get let down, by a person or place
 Or somethin' you trusted, well, ya put up a fight
 Till what's lost is found

The song ends, the reunion tour along with it, and Joe physically attacks Billy, putting an end to Hard Core Logo once and for all. As Joe and Billy scuffle on the floor of the club, John takes the microphone and performs an impromptu, stream of consciousness poetry reading. Joe and Billy are pulled apart and the audience stands in stunned silence as John settles on one phrase, repeating it over and over: "and in the end it's love." The words drive home the point that Joe loves Billy because he needs Billy to complete his own identity. In contrast, Billy only broke Joe's heart.

Hard Core Logo deals largely with the relationships between the band members, to the nearly total exclusion of the group's fans. This is not to say that the fans do not assume a role within the film, but just that their role is secondary to, and supportive of,

the role of the musicians. As such, the concert sequences within the film follow the ideological camera placement of the backstage musical, allowing the film's viewer to occupy both the place of the concert audience, as well as that of the musicians themselves on the stage.

U2 and Madonna

In Chapter One I briefly discussed the relationship between *Rattle and Hum* and *Truth or Dare*. I will extend that discussion somewhat here. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Steve Neale has suggested that genres evolve in a non-linear fashion over time:

Each new genre film constitutes an addition to an existing generic corpus and involves a selection from the repertoire of generic elements available at any one point in time. Some elements are included; others are excluded... In addition, each new genre film tends to extend this repertoire, either by adding a new element or by transgressing one of the old ones.⁶

The advantage to this approach is in its ability to account for the unpredictable nature of film genres. I previously illustrated how *Truth or Dare* was aesthetically more similar to *Don't Look Back* than to the more contemporary *Rattle and Hum*. These films demonstrate the nature of an evolving film genre, leaping back and forth as it develops.

Despite the differences between them, *Rattle and Hum* and *Truth or Dare* both fit comfortably within the subgenre of the tour film. Both of the films adopt a similar approach to the tour, in that both U2 and Madonna speak of journeys, rather than tours or concerts. For U2, the film *Rattle and Hum* is a musical journey, rather than a documentary about their concert tour. U2 try to hide the lines dividing them from the audience with selective wording: while most people in the audience have not been part of a rock tour (at least not the touring part; they have obviously attended at least one show if

they are in the audience), a journey is something that everybody understands and has experienced in some form or another.

Drawing upon Frith's work, Philip Auslander notes "that what counts as authentic varies among musical genres and subgenres."⁷ The sense of authenticity that either The Band or U2 may achieve through their music does not necessarily apply to Madonna in the same way, and she seems to understand this, at one point referring to her live show as more like live theater than a typical rock show. Like U2, Madonna uses words to distance herself from the dividing line. Twice during the film she says that she cannot compromise her artistic integrity by leaving out part of her show, once when her father asks her to "tone it down a bit" and again later when the police threaten to arrest her if she performs a simulated sex act during the show. Both times she performs the show with no alterations and, later, she says that it is not about the art, but about the journey that she is on. The effect of this is much the same as when U2 refers to a journey. Madonna removes herself from the isolated world of a concert tour and sets herself up to be associated with the members of her audience.

A tendency of the rock film is to physically separate the performer from the typical concert space, bringing them into the realm of 'everyday life'. In *Rattle and Hum*, the concert venues are stadiums for the most part, the largest venue seen in any of the three films, and also the one with the greatest space between the band and the audience. How then can the division between U2 and their audience be broken down? The film achieves this during the first half of the film. The film begins with U2 on stage performing. This is followed by a series of images which take them away from the stadium. These images include a river, several factories, and the band themselves outside.

The film continues to employ this technique throughout its first half. The most explicit example is prefaced by a short interview with The Edge, where he describes “I Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking For” as a gospel song. This interview is followed by a sequence where U2 actually leave the stadiums behind and record a version of their song with a gospel choir in a church in Harlem. This is a prime example of the folk ideology as it is used by rock: U2 are depicted not as rock stars, but as a gospel rock band, and the members of the choir are invited to join the band, if only for the duration of that scene.

Truth or Dare also physically takes Madonna away from the concert tour for the duration of one song. During her performance of “Vogue,” the film cuts away from the live show and we are treated to a montage of clips highlighting Madonna dancing in clubs, goofing around at the beach, etc. More interesting than this sequence, however, is her relationship with the dancers in her show, specifically with Oliver Crumes. It is through Crumes that the film tries to ground Madonna in a ‘normal’ life. We learn early on in the film that Crumes has not seen his father in five years. Madonna takes Crumes under her wing and talks to him about the difficulties he has had with his father. Later, in a voice-over, Madonna informs us that she has become attached to the dancers and has become like a mother to them. Once again, in doing this, the division between Madonna and the audience is broken down. In the same way that the Harlem church scene allows U2 to escape their image as rock stars, the association of Madonna with a mother posits her as ‘one of us,’ rather than as ‘one of them.’

Another tendency I wish to identify is related to another point that Auslander notes: “that authenticity can be heard in the music, yet is an effect not just of the music itself but also of prior musical and extra-musical knowledge and beliefs.”⁸ To this end,

both *The Last Waltz* and *Rattle and Hum* engage in the same technique, citing other musicians, who have developed their own reputations for authenticity, as influences. I will refer only to the U2 film at this point, having dealt with *The Last Waltz* in far more depth in Chapter Three. This technique for achieving authenticity is evidenced in *Rattle and Hum* when B.B. King and his band join U2 for a performance. Together they rehearse and perform a song that U2 say was written specifically for King, "When Love Comes To Town." U2 is granted approval when King tells them how much he loves the song. The band become identified with King and are able to benefit from any prior knowledge and beliefs held by the audience regarding King. Since King is a blues musician, a style that is considered to be a folk music, the ideology of folk is once more appropriated by rock through the fostering of a sense of community between the younger, richer, more popular musicians and the older, more "authentic" bluesman.

The journey in the tour film is of a physical nature, altering the way in which the musicians must achieve their authenticity. Relationships are difficult to sustain with the fans, since the band is constantly on the move towards the next town. In fact, the only relationships which appear to have any stability at all are those amongst the touring party. The result of this dynamic is that the performers must, to some extent, sacrifice their individual identities to become a part of the group. As Marcus argues, this group then becomes an image of community, representing the fans as well as the performers as they struggle to retain their authenticity in the face of a less authentic opposition. This authenticity is necessary in order to blur the dividing line between the performer and the fan.

¹ Greil Marcus, *Mystery Train: Images of America in Rock 'n' Roll Music*, (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1982), 72.

² Ibid., 44.

³ Ibid.

⁴ David Laderman, *Driving Visions: Exploring The Road Movie* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 6.

⁵ Jeff Smith, *The Sounds of Commerce: Marketing Popular Film Music* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 171.

⁶ Steve Neale, "Questions of Genre" in *Film Genre Reader II*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 170.

⁷ Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*, (New York: Routledge, 1999), 66.

⁸ Ibid.

Chapter 5

Snakes and Ladders: The Rise and Fall Film

The rock film as a whole is intertwined with the depiction of some sort of journey. However, each of the three main subgenres focuses on that journey in a different way. As we have seen, the tour film tends to deal with a physical journey through space and the event film deals with a sort of metaphorical journey. Likewise, the rise and fall film, while occasionally overlapping with both of the previous approaches, has its own agenda where the journey is concerned. There is a tendency to spend precious little time with the body of the journey, instead focussing largely upon the beginning and the end of the journey. This is not to say that the films in this area ignore the body of the journey completely. Considerable screen time is given to depicting the action which takes place between the beginning and end of the journey. However, where both of the previous subgenres are largely concerned with the mythical transformation which occurs during the process of the journey itself, the rise and fall by its very definition deals with the body of the journey as little more than the binding which holds together the beginning and ending. There is always a sense that the films' characters are driving towards an inevitable ending to their journeys, unlike the other subgenres where, despite the importance of the ending, it is often the way in which that ending is reached which holds more importance. In contrast, the rise and fall is defined by the musicians' beginning and ending. As a result, we tend to see the rise and fall film dealing with a large span of time, often a musician's, or group's, entire life.

The rise and fall film is generally driven towards the fall, or end of the journey. The beginning is often referred to in terms of a long gone past, albeit one where the true authenticity of the musicians can be found. As such, this particular subgenre is very much concerned with the struggle to retain the authenticity which is shown to have been so effortless in the beginning of their career as they achieve some measure of success in the music industry. This is exactly why the ending is of so much importance in these films: it is in the end that the musician must reconcile with his origins. This ending often involves the death of the musician(s) in question (as in the death of the main characters in *The Harder They Come* [1973], *La Bamba* [1987], and *The Doors* [1991]), but it can also be the ending of a particular episode in the existence of the subject. *Jailhouse Rock* (1957) falls into this category, with Everett's return from the obnoxious star to the more authentic and caring person he was in the beginning of the film, as well as the end of The Commitments' and The Oneders' musical careers in *The Commitments* (1991) and *That Thing You Do* (1996) respectively. Due to the nature of the journey's end as the driving force in this subgenre, I will deal with the ending first.

The Filth and the Fury

In the rise and fall film, the journey's end is rarely an overwhelmingly happy one. Rather, there is a definite tendency for the journey to end with some sort of loss for those involved. This can be either a physical loss, such as the previously mentioned deaths in *The Harder They Come* and *The Doors*, or a metaphorical one, such as the way in which *Standing In The Shadows Of Motown* (2002) uses a reunion concert to underline how much both The Funk Brothers and the audience lost when they were cast aside by

Motown after the record label moved from Detroit to Los Angeles. *The Filth and the Fury* (2000), a documentary about the British punk band The Sex Pistols, combines both of these approaches for a powerful image of the journey in the rock film. *The Filth and the Fury* documents the relatively brief eighteen-month existence of The Sex Pistols, culminating in their onstage self-destruction during their first tour of the United States, and followed soon after by the death of bass player Sid Vicious by heroin overdose. The band was involved in numerous struggles throughout its existence (for example, they were signed and dropped by two record labels before finally releasing their one and only album on a third). On one hand, this struggle became one of life and death for the band itself and Vicious in particular. On the other hand, it was a struggle between authenticity and capitalism, as the values of the band members (the social commentary of singer Johnny Rotten and the desire of guitarist Steve Jones and drummer Paul Cook to play straight ahead, simple rock music) were being twisted into a marketing tool by their manager, Malcolm McLaren, the record label, and the increasing numbers of punk rock fans.¹ The effect of the journey's end is best demonstrated through three short segments near the end of *The Filth and the Fury*. All three of these make use of a present day interview with Rotten, in conjunction with historical footage, both of the band and from various other sources.²

The first segment refers to a time when The Sex Pistols' popularity was on the rise, and yet the musicians themselves were receiving none of the money that was being made. While this is a contentious issue for a rock band (as has already been noted in previous chapters), and some might argue that, if the group had been an authentic

expression of the common man, they should have had little desire or worry over such matters as financial remuneration, the film does an admirable job of papering over the cracks and countering such an argument. Rotten and Jones inform the viewer that, while McLaren would not even give them enough money to pay their rent, he did decide to spend their money on making a film (*The Great Rock 'n' Roll Swindle* [1980], also known as *Who Killed Bambi?*) purporting to depict the evils of a capitalistic record industry, while it was in truth little more than an obvious attempt at cashing in on The Sex Pistols' success. So, the film shows the band as being unable to meet their own basic needs, while their own manager is lining his pockets through no effort of his own. Of course, this is nothing unique in the rock film. We might recall that in *Gimme Shelter* (1970) The Rolling Stones' lawyer at one point suggests that he would be happy to pocket all of the money from Altamont for himself.

The difference here is that *The Filth and the Fury* actively works to make McLaren appear as "the evil manager" whose greed played a large role in the group's downfall (and who also symbolizes everything that is "wrong" with the music industry). This is perhaps enunciated most clearly during a short sequence of shots, beginning with a voice-over from Rotten, accompanying images from *The Great Rock 'n' Roll Swindle*: "How can you be a Sex Pistol with no money? You ring the office, you get zero response. Your cheques weren't paid. No rent. No earnings. A complete disaster." Upon this last statement, the soundtrack for McLaren's film fades up and a character shouts out "it was wonderful!" Here *The Filth and the Fury* has McLaren's film stand in for McLaren himself, reinforcing the idea that it was the manager's capitalistic impulses that beat

down the musicians' artistic impulses. The sequence is completed when Rotten returns in voice-over: "It was a monkey's tea party. What the fuck was the manager doing? The one that claimed he was manipulating everything, manipulated nothing. He was clueless at that point." The film now cuts to a series of shots of monkeys dressed in clothes and having a tea party.³ The first two shots, while strange, at least fit into the common perception as to how a traditional tea party would play itself out. The first shot is of a monkey sipping from a tea cup. This is followed by a shot of two monkeys sitting side by side at a table, while one of them pours a cup of tea.

Together, these shots suggest that it might be possible to take one object and fit it into a role in which it does not traditionally exist, much as McLaren claims to have done with the marketing of The Sex Pistols and their roles in *The Great Rock 'n' Roll Swindle*. However, the film immediately alters this suggestion with the next shots. Now, the original monkey is no longer sipping from the tea cup; rather, he is holding the cup sideways and slurping tea from the saucer. From here, things only degenerate further, as the next shot is a close up of two monkeys wildly shaking their heads back and forth as they open and close their mouths. Furthermore, the sound of hysterical laughter enters the soundtrack at this point. All of this points to a suggestion that it is just as impossible for a group of monkeys to hold a traditional tea party as it is for McLaren to successfully manipulate The Sex Pistols into being something they are not (film stars as opposed to a rock group).

Metaphorically speaking, we might consider this sequence to be a representation of the beginning of the end. It is at this point that Rotten is claiming that the band was

essentially on the losing end of its battle to succeed. The band could no longer be considered as part of the audience out of which they grew, and yet they had not achieved the success for which they were reaching. Instead, they occupied a sort of limbo.

Whereas in *Gimme Shelter* the lawyers are put into the service of The Rolling Stones, allowing the band to play for the fans, and in *Almost Famous* (2000), Stillwater eventually escape the capitalist demands of the record companies regarding the use of a plane in order to make more money, *The Filth and the Fury* leaves The Sex Pistols on the losing end of their struggle. If their own management is intent on turning them into little more than a commodity, then what hope does the band have against the ‘establishment.’ Of course, we would do well to remember that, in the end, The Sex Pistols achieved a level of mythology that would have been difficult to reach had they made their money and became a ‘professional’ group of musicians.

The second sequence I will mention here refers to both the metaphorical death of The Sex Pistols and the physical death of Sid Vicious. Again, it is centered on an interview with Rotten, but this time it is intercut with film footage and the soundtrack from The Sex Pistols’ final show.⁴ It is worth mentioning a few things about this footage, as it provides an anchor for the final ten minutes of the film. The footage itself is in color, but extremely grainy and somewhat unstable, supporting the often used “documentary-style” approach to concert footage. Of most importance here, however, is Rotten’s introduction as the band takes the stage: “You’ll get one number and one number only, because I’m a lazy bastard.”⁵ At first consideration, this statement would seem to place The Sex Pistols in direct opposition to the values of rock music, but this is plainly not

true if we take into consideration the group's relationship with their audience at this point.

The film has already raised an invisible wall between the 'real' fans, those who were peers with the band members in the beginning, and the new, 'fake' fans who are into the band not for their music, but for the spectacle of their image. At one point, footage of kids jumping around to The Sex Pistols' "Pretty Vacant" is juxtaposed with Vicious saying "it's a pity, in a way, all these rich kids becoming punks. I find that revolting." As in the rock-folk argument, the 'true' fans, the authentic fans, are the group from whom the musicians emerge: "the main thing is that the songs are made and sung by men [*sic*] who are identical with their audience in standing, in occupation, in attitude to life, and in daily experience."⁶ The fans are not supposed to come after the music. Rotten takes this attitude even further, saying "the punks ruined it. They adopted a uniform image and attitude, and the whole thing was about being yourself." It matters very little here that Rotten and Jones both later accuse Vicious of being too interested in image and having too little musical substance. That particular contradiction is smoothed over by the film's (and Rotten's) insistence that Vicious was a great fan of the band before joining them and that it was his heroin use that prevented him from fulfilling his musical role within the group. The important point here is that The Sex Pistols were no longer fighting the same fight that their fans were, and, more importantly, that the film sets these fans up as being somehow less worthy than the original ones. According to the film, the second generation of fans were more interested in the spectacle that The Sex Pistols became, so when Rotten antagonizes them at the final concert, two objectives are being

accomplished: 1) the fans are getting exactly what they signed up for, thus supporting the myth of the audience; and 2) The Sex Pistols are able to remain authentic, defending their own values, as well as those of their 'true' fans, by choosing when and where to go out in much the same way that The Band did in *The Last Waltz* (1978). As Feuer argued regarding the backstage musical, *The Filth and the Fury* sets the performers up as being sympathetic to the needs of their audience. It matters little that the band are selective in choosing which members of their audience they are sensitive to, since, as Auslander has suggested, every type of rock music depends on an opposition, an inauthentic Other, in order to present itself as the authentic version of rock.

After Rotten's short speech, the band bursts into "No Fun," a song which quickly degenerates into little more than a two chord vamp over which Rotten continually screams "no fun!" This is the footage that is used underneath a series of interviews with the various band members, in which they each discuss what they saw as the reasons for the band's destruction. While each member has his own version of the events leading to the breakup, the film makes it abundantly clear where the blame lies. The band's breakup is left unresolved for the moment, as "No Fun" fades in and out while the last days of Sid Vicious are recounted through newscasts and period interviews with the man himself, covering his arrest for the stabbing death of girlfriend Nancy Spungen to his own death by overdose. At this point, the film utilizes another interview with Rotten to accuse the capitalistic industry of destroying both the band and Vicious, while also reinforcing The Sex Pistols' authenticity in the face of this moneymaking machine: "I've lost my friend. I couldn't have changed it. I was too young. God, I wish I was smarter. You can look back

on it and go ‘I could have done something.’ He died, for fuck’s sake. And they just turned it into making money. Ha ha ha. Hilarious for them. Fucking cheek. I’ll hate them forever for doing that. You can’t get more evil than that, can you?”

The Filth and the Fury makes two final statements regarding the journey’s end. The first of these is in the form of the footage from that final concert when the band finally bring “No Fun” to an end and Rotten laughs, asking the audience “ever get the feeling you’ve been cheated?” If the journey in the rock film is a struggle to reach someplace new, but which almost invariably results in some sort of loss, then this film emphasizes just that. The Sex Pistols began as an outgrowth from their surroundings and they ended up in isolation from those beginnings and in the service of capitalism. In the end, they were loved by some and despised by others, but they did not fit into either side. This individuality perhaps makes it even easier for the film to cast them in an immortal light where they forever stayed true to the rock-folk argument.⁷

As a final note regarding *The Filth and the Fury*, I will draw attention to Rotten’s final words in the film: “We did what we had to do and that’s why we didn’t survive. Only the fakes survive. All I want is for future generations to just say ‘fuck it. I’ve had enough. Here’s the truth.’” The interesting thing here is that, while The Sex Pistols did not survive as a group to continue making music, their mythology, derived in large part from a single album and its conjunctions with the publicly constructed images of the band, has survived considerably longer than other groups which were together for longer periods of time. And *The Filth and the Fury* plays no small role in carrying that mythology on even further.

The journey of the rise and fall film places considerable importance upon the ending. The ending, however, is always grounded by, and in some ways determined by, the journey's origin. Taking a step backwards now, let us consider the journey's beginning. This can be done in two parts. First, I will draw attention to some of the visual artifacts which arise in the genre as a whole concerning the beginning. Specifically, there is a tendency for the films to present a particular type of setting in order to place the group in question within a working class background. Again, there is some overlap between subgenres. We saw this in *The Last Waltz*, with the opening shots of the streets of San Francisco, but it is also evident in numerous other films. As I have said, however, the rise and fall film is defined by the beginning and end of the journey. As such, *The Filth and the Fury* is perhaps one of the most overt examples of the placement of the beginning of the journey in working class backgrounds, as images of crumbling buildings, garbage piled up on street corners, and unemployed workers are juxtaposed with a history lesson of sorts from Rotten, describing the situation of the working class, as well as personal testimonials from Rotten and Jones, rooting their own backgrounds and the emergence of the band within the situation of the working class.

Rattle & Hum (1988) takes a similar route, also using images which can be construed as working class settings.⁸ Specifically, the film draws upon images of Irish factories, at times placing the members of U2 in the foreground of the images. The soundtrack here plays a role just as important as in *The Filth and the Fury* as U2's "Van Diemen's Land" plays over the images. Bono sings of being deported to Tasmania for criticizing the government, crystallizing the image of the group as being both part of the

working class community in opposition to the government, and also as being at the beginning of a journey to find their place in a world where capitalism rules:

*Now kings will rule and the poor will toil
And tear their hands as they tear the soil
But a day will come in this dawning age
When an honest man sees an honest wage.*

Again, the film (and the band) ignores the obvious contradiction between their claim to be a part of the working class and the reality of their financial situation (being a group who is selling out hockey arenas and football stadiums around the world), but this is precisely the intent of the genre: to establish and then mask the lines of difference between the group and its fans.

The Harder They Come

This tendency towards the ‘working class’ image is not specific to documentaries in the genre, featuring prominently in films such as *The Commitments*, *That Thing You Do!*, and *Rockstar* (2001). The Jamaican film, *The Harder They Come* (1973), also places the origins of the journey within the working class, opening with a sequence of the film’s main character, Ivanhoe Martin, riding a bus through the Jamaican countryside and into the city. The promise of an end to the journey is emphasized upon his arrival in the city with a close shot of a billboard reading “Talk with Phillip Waite for a better life.” The suggestion is that there might be a way out of the shanty towns from where Ivanhoe has come. The reality, of course, is much the same as in the other films which have already been discussed. Ivan comes up against the capitalist forces which drive the recording industry and, rather than siding with the industry, Ivanhoe’s journey ends in his death at

the hands of a corrupt police force, thereby preserving his mythological place amongst the audience, despite the success he eventually achieved as a musician.

In the rock film, the beginning of the journey is generally something that is depicted as a shaping force in the lives of the musicians, emphasizing the folk-rock argument that Simon Frith describes and thereby insuring that the musicians and their music retain the authenticity of their pre-music-industry origins. As such, the visual representations of the music's origins are not the only way in which the journey's beginning and the musicians' origins are manifested in the genre. It is here that the journey's beginning overlaps with the community which is central to both the folk-rock argument and the myth of entertainment. Where the journey's end appears in the genre as a specter of doom, always waiting around the corner to destroy the music's authenticity, the beginning most often exists only in the past. References to this beginning abound in the films, primarily in order to present a standard to which the music must be held. The authenticity of the origins must be preserved at all costs, hence the struggle which exists for the musicians who are caught between the music industry and the fans. The rock film goes to all ends to keep the musicians on the right side in this struggle, where their authenticity can remain intact despite any sort of financial success they might achieve. We have already seen how *The Last Waltz* used both a parade of guest performers and stories such as that told by Robbie Robertson and Levon Helm about bluesman Sonny Boy Williamson to suggest the group's own authenticity. D. A. Pennebaker's film of Bob Dylan's final solo acoustic tour of Britain, *Don't Look Back* (1967), also emphasizes the singer's authenticity through images which suggest that Dylan is a part of a community

that is more authentic than the music industry. During an interview, Dylan is asked how he got started in music. The film then cuts to a scene of Dylan singing and playing guitar in a field, surrounded by presumably low paid African-American workers. The suggestion here is that Dylan's origins are as 'earthy' as those of the workers. We are meant to believe that he began playing music not for any sort of financial gain, but merely for the love of music, and that this is shared by those surrounding him in the field. From here the film whisks us off to one of Dylan's concerts in Britain; however, we do not see the paying audience in this sequence. Instead, the camera focuses on Dylan alone on the stage, dressed in black with darkness all around. The only indication that there is an audience is the applause that we hear, reminding us that Dylan is one of us and that we should be cheering for him, not the industry.

Where the tour and event films are interested in the beginning generally as a device to be referred to as the past origin of the artist's authenticity, often seen through a present day representation of the community from which the artist originally emerged, the rise and fall film often depicts the actual origin of the artist. We see this in the images and voice-overs of *The Filth And The Fury* and the flashback to Jim Morrison's early family car trip in *The Doors*. *Jailhouse Rock* shows us Vince Everett's early working class life in the film's opening sequences as he kills a man in a brawl and is then sent to jail, setting events in motion for his transformation into an artist. As mentioned above, *The Harder They Come* is also explicit in its depiction of Ivanhoe Martin's working class origins. In this film, those origins are inextricably bound up with Martin's musical success. This recalls Jane Feuer's discussion of the myth of integration: "Successful

performances are intimately bound up... with the integration of the individual into a community or a group.”⁹ Martin’s working class origins serve to integrate him with the community at large. Further to this, we will see how the film manages to keep Martin within this community even once he achieves popular success. It is, in fact, a direct result of Martin’s integration with his audience that he is able to become a star, something he is unable to achieve until he embraces his origins. The Jamaica of the film is a scene of abject poverty for the vast majority of the population. Martin has come to Kingston with the goal of becoming a famous pop star, but the record producer Hilton will only push the record to the radio stations if Martin sells the rights for next to nothing. Martin refuses and, like many of the other lower class characters of the film’s setting, must then turn to a marijuana dealing operation to make ends meet. The situation is complicated by the corrupt government’s efforts to direct the bulk of the profits from the drug trade into its own coffers rather than the pockets of the lower class. As Martin focuses on fighting back against the government, arguing that it is the people around him who should be making the bulk of the money and escaping from poverty, his music gains in popularity even without Hilton’s backing. Martin is hailed as a political hero, and thus becomes successful as a musician, because he embraces the people around him rather than taking Hilton’s payoff. Thus, Martin’s entire journey is defined by his origin. He can only have what he desires (musical success) by embracing his roots (within the lower class). And the end of his journey is destined from the start as well. Since his success comes out of his popularity as a folk hero for the people, the film must prevent him from escaping from the living conditions of those people and becoming a capitalist success like Hilton.

To this end, Martin's death at the end of the film is assured by the oppressive nature of his origins.

The tour film sets out to prolong the artist's journey, allowing for the preservation of authenticity through constant movement. Even in *The Last Waltz*, where the entire film is structured around the end of The Band, there is still a sense of movement when it is all over. Rick Danko will continue making music and Richard Manuel will keep trying to 'break even.' The rise and fall film, in contrast, tends towards a predetermined ending involving some sort of loss of a more definite kind, often, but not always, death. *The Filth and the Fury* deals to some extent with the death of Sid Vicious, but this was not the reason for the end of The Sex Pistols. Still, the surviving members speak of the band as something that has itself died, and the film supports their assertions.¹⁰ The myth of entertainment is a vital part of the rise and fall film, providing justification for the loss-filled endings. For *The Filth and the Fury*, the myth of the audience is center-stage in Rotten's discussion of why the Sex Pistols had to end. We should recall that Simon Frith suggested that the rock community was a transient one.¹¹ For Johnny Rotten, then, there is no future beyond the original community, and once that community has disbanded the band itself must cease to exist out of sympathy for the original community. *The Harder They Come* is similar in that Martin can only achieve the success he desires when he is sympathetic to the desires of the audience, fighting 'the man' for them, thus both integrating him into the community and highlighting his differences from them. As Frith suggested, this is the paradox of rock ideology: "that performers' claims to represent a community... were supported by the marks of their individuality."¹² In the end, the rise

and fall film, like the rock film's other subgenres, works to blur the lines of difference between the performer and the audience in order to establish the performer as an image of community.

¹ I don't wish to argue that the band itself played no part in this marketing, just that none of the members admit to it within this film.

² It is interesting to note that all of the present-day interviews feature the band members in silhouette, thus preserving their image as a youthful group based in a past that no longer exists.

³ The sequence actually features several chimpanzees, which are apes, not monkeys. However, in the interest of consistency with the film, I will refer to them as monkeys.

⁴ Interestingly, this concert took place at The Winterland Ballroom in San Francisco, the same venue where The Band held their own farewell concert just two years previous.

⁵ Although the film presents this as being the entire concert, Rotten actually said this when The Sex Pistols returned to the stage for an encore after playing a full set.

⁶ A.L. Lloyd, *Folk Song in England* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975), 346.

⁷ The reality is of course very different. During their existence The Sex Pistols were very much playing into the image that they and the press had created together. Furthermore, in 1996 the group reunited (with original bass player Glen Matlock in Vicious' place) for The Filthy Lucre Tour.

⁸ This again demonstrates the overlap which exists between subgenres.

⁹ Jane Feuer, "The Self-reflective Musical and the Myth of Entertainment," in *Genre, the Musical: A Reader*, ed. Rick Altman (London: BFI, 1981), 166.

¹⁰ Again, the 1996 reunion tour demonstrates just how much the rock film works to hide the contradictions inherent in the artists' claims of authenticity.

¹¹ Simon Frith, "'The Magic That Can Set You Free': The Ideology of Folk and the Myth of the Rock Community" *Popular Music*, 1 (1981): 166.

¹² Ibid.

Conclusion

If the western has been under fire from critics trying to sound the genre's death knell, the rock film has had the opposite problem: No one seems to want to allow for its existence as a genre that is distinct from the musical and the road film. The general consensus has been that there are too few films sharing too little in common to be considered a genre unto themselves. This is an unfortunate stance to take, since it assumes that there is a magic number of films required for a genre to exist. Furthermore, once we begin to study the films which make use of rock music, we can see that there most certainly are a number of shared characteristics between many of the films. Of course, similarities can exist between films of differing genres as well, so the identification of those characteristics is merely one step in the long process of a genre study. What is more interesting than the fact that there are formal and thematic elements which recur amongst many of these films is that the forms and themes are used in ways which are unique to the rock film. As such, we can say with some measure of confidence that a film like *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1973), which uses rock music as its mode of presentation, is considerably different from *Jailhouse Rock* (1957), *Gimme Shelter* (1970), or *The Harder They Come* (1973), all of which integrate both rock music and rock ideology into their narratives.

The rock film is about much more than simply using rock music within the film and this is where we see the value of studying the genre and its relationships with other pre-existing ones. The rock ideology as put forth by Simon Frith is very much related to the myth of entertainment which Jane Feuer cites as the driving force behind the

backstage musicals. This relationship offers us a window into the overlapping nature of film genres. While the rock film and the musical are each distinct groupings of films, the musical subgenre which Feuer discusses shares a number of themes with the rock film. However, within the rock film, these themes are not relegated to a single subgenre, but rather they become a major force within the entire genre.

The quest for authenticity which drives both Feuer's myth of entertainment and Frith's rock-folk ideology is the most prominent theme within the rock film. The appropriation of these themes is particularly interesting, as it demonstrates how two particular forms (rock music and the backstage musical) come together in a new, hybrid form. The rock film, then, insists upon an interdisciplinary approach to film genre. While it is true that other genres originated in varying forms, such as the literary roots of the western and the gangster film, the rock film is a unique case where interdisciplinary study is concerned. Whereas other genres may have roots in other artistic forms, they also tend to become primarily film genres once the transition to film has been made. The rock film, in contrast, remains intimately tied to the music and ideology which form its base structure.

The rock film is a relatively new film genre. Its roots can be found in the musical, and later in the road film, and in the emergence of rock music in the 1950s. However, as Rick Altman has suggested, it takes time for a genre to develop into a relatively consistent form. In the case of the rock film, this form is one of a larger genre consisting of three main subgenres: the tour film, the event film, and the rise and fall film. It was not

until the mid to late-1960s that these three subgenres really began to take on an identifiable shape.

As the rock film's back catalogue has expanded throughout the years, the tendency has been to draw more and more upon the history of the genre for both the formal and thematic elements that appear in each film, leading to fewer innovations in the newer films. While this at first suggests that the rock film may already be on the wane, that is not exactly true. Further investigation might point to periods when the rock film appears to hit a plateau, or even disappear from the map of modern film, but every time the genre is pronounced dead, another rock film comes along to dispel that notion.¹

This apparent slowdown in the genre's evolution may be in part due to the rock film now having too many outlets for it to remain focused as a film genre. No longer is it necessary for these films to be shown in movie theatres. As we see a mainstream acceptance of the dvd format, there is now a virtual onslaught of direct to video rock films, falling largely into the category of the concert film, but with some notable exceptions such as Don Lett's documentary *The Clash: Westway to the World* (2001).² Furthermore, a renewed interest in the rock film has meant that some of these films are actually receiving theatrical releases where they might not have previously: Amos Poe's documentary on Steve Earle, *Just An American Boy* (2003), had originally been meant for a video release, but was then shifted to a theatrical one instead. Part of the reason for this is the public's growing knowledge that there is a genre of rock films which provide them with a visual take not just of rock songs, as music videos often do, but also of the artists

themselves.³ There is now considerable emphasis by the producers on each new dvd music release, due in large part to the interest of this previously untapped market.

Television has also played a role in diluting the rock film. No longer are concert specials relegated to specialty music video networks. Now, specials like *Bruce Springsteen & The E Street Band: Live In Barcelona* (2003) play on major television networks before heading into a second life as a dvd release. Additionally, programs like *The Osbournes* are altering the format of the rock film from feature length documentary to shorter sitcom styled plots. Still, it should be noted that *The Osbournes* works in the same ideological manner of the rock film. At one level we see Ozzy Osbourne off stage in the role of father. When we see the rock star unable to work a VCR, we are left with a feeling that he is not all that different from the rest of us. At another level, however, the show follows the rock film's tendency to remythicize the character. We are meant to see a connection between Osbourne and his audience, but the reality is that he is nothing like his fans.

Dave Marsh tried to argue that there was no need for a study of the rock film based upon the variety of film and music styles which might be considered. In the same way that his argument was less than adequate for ignoring the genre, neither does this dissemination of the genre's formats mean that study should be discontinued. Rather, I would suggest that it means just the opposite. The rock film's past offers us an opportunity to track the evolution of a genre in relation to other, pre-existing genres as well as in its relationship to rock music. Now we are afforded the chance to see how the

genre holds up to this incursion of various other formats. This seems to me the logical direction for further study where the rock film is concerned.

Even in the face of the changing nature of the rock film, there is still much work to be done concerning its past as well. My goal here has been to lay out a theoretical framework for the discussion of the genre, a sketch of its evolution, and of the three main subgenres which have come to the forefront since the collision between rock and film in the mid-1950s. I briefly touched upon the role of television in the genre's development, but there is still much room for further investigation into the conjunction of television and film. The same can be said of the role of MTV in the rock film's evolution. Granted, there is much work that has already been done on these topics, but none of it has approached the topic from the perspective that the rock film itself is a distinct genre.⁴

¹ In fact, there seems to be a recent boom in big screen rock films with *Prey For Rock & Roll* (2003), *Just An American Boy* (2003), *Metallica: Some Kind Of Monster* (2004), and more, all seeing release within the last year.

² Lett's film was played on television in a vastly shorter version in 2000, before being released on dvd in its original form the next year.

³ It should be noted that music videos also provide visual interpretations of the musicians, but that the rock film does so in much more detail than is possible in the shorter music video format.

⁴ See, for example, John Mundy's *Popular Music on Screen: From the Hollywood Musical to Music Video*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999) and Andrew Goodwin's *Dancing in the Distraction Factory: Music Television and Popular Culture*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992).

Date	Jukebox Narrative	Rock Musical	Compilation Score	Event Film	Tour Film	Rise and Fall Film	Other
1955							- Blackboard Jungle
1956	- Rock Around the Clock - Don't Knock the Rock - Shake, Rattle and Rock - Rock, Rock, Rock - The Girl Can't Help It	- Love Me Tender					- Rock Pretty Baby
1957	- Untamed Youth - The Big Beat - Carnival Rock - Rock All Night - Rock, Baby, Rock It - Jamboree	- Loving You				- Jailhouse Rock - Mr. Rock and Roll	
1958	- Go, Johnny, Go - High School Confidential	- King Creole					
1959							
1960	- Because They're Young - Beat Girl	- G.I. Blues					
1961	- Twist Around the Clock - Twist All Night - Hey, Let's Twist!	- Girls! Girls! Girls!					

Date	Jukebox Narrative	Rock Musical	Compilation Score	Event Film	Tour Film	Rise and Fall Film	Other
1962	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Don't Knock the Twist - Wild Guitar - Ring-A-Ding Rhythm - Swingin' Along - Play It Cool 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Two Tickets to Paris 					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lonely Boy
1963	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Beach Party - Just For Fun - Sing and Swing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bye Bye Birdie 					
1964	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Muscle Beach Party - Bikini Beach - Get Yourself A College Girl - Surf Party 						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A Hard Day's Night
1965	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How to Stuff A Wild Bikini - Ferry Cross the Mersey - Having A Wild Weekend - Ballad In Blue - Wild on the Beach - A Swingin' Summer 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The T.A.M.I. Show 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Help!
1966	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Ghost in the Invisible Bikini - Out of Sight - Wild, Wild Winter 						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Charlie is My Darling - Hold On! - Chappaqua

Date	Jukebox Narrative	Rock Musical	Compilation Score	Event Film	Tour Film	Rise and Fall Film	Other
1967	- Riot on Sunset Strip - The Cool Ones - The Love-Ins - Catalina Caper - It's A Bikini World	- Double Trouble	- The Graduate	- Festival	- Don't Look Back		
1968	- Psych-Out - Wild In the Streets - Here We Go 'Round the Mulberry Bush	- The Fastest Guitar Alive		- Sympathy for the Devil/One Plus One			- Head - Yellow Submarine - Uncle Meat - Mrs. Brown You've Got A Lovely Daughter
1969			- Easy Rider	- Monterey Pop			
1970				- Woodstock - Gimme Shelter - Let it Be			
1971					- 200 Motels		
1972				- Pink Floyd at Pompeii	- Eat the Document - Cocksucker Blues		
1973	- Let the Good Times Roll	- Jesus Christ Superstar	- American Graffiti		- Ladies and Gentlemen: The Rolling Stones	- The Harder They Come	
1974						- Stardust	

Date	Jukebox Narrative	Rock Musical	Compilation Score	Event Film	Tour Film	Rise and Fall Film	Other
1975		- Tommy - The Rocky Horror Picture Show					
1976							
1977			- Saturday Night Fever				
1978	- Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band	- Grease		- The Last Waltz - The Punk Rock Movie		- The Buddy Holly Story - American Hot Wax - The Rutles	- KISS Meets the Phantom of the Park - Renaldo and Clara
1979	- Rock 'n' Roll High School	- Quadrophenia - Hair		- Rust Never Sleeps		- The Great Rock and Roll Swindle - The Kids Are Alright - The Rose	
1980	- The Blues Brothers						- Rude Boy
1981				- The Decline of Western Civilization - Let's Spend the Night Together			
1982		- Pink Floyd: The Wall					
1983						- Eddie and the Cruisers	

Date	Jukebox Narrative	Rock Musical	Compilation Score	Event Film	Tour Film	Rise and Fall Film	Other
1984				- Stop Making Sense		- This Is Spinal Tap - Purple Rain	
1985							
1986					- Crossroads	- Sid and Nancy	
1987				- Chuck Berry Hail! Hail! Rock 'n' Roll - Sign 'o' the Times	- Light of Day	- La Bamba	
1988				- The Decline of Western Civilization Part II: The Metal Years - Big Time	- Rattle and Hum	- Imagine: John Lennon - Satisfaction	- Tougher Than Leather
1989						- Eddie and the Cruisers II: Eddie Lives! - Graffiti Bridge	
1990							
1991				- At the Max	- Truth or Dare	- The Commitments - The Doors	
1992							
1993			- Dazed and Confused			- Backbeat - What's Love Got to Do With It?	
1994			- Forrest Gump				

Date	Jukebox Narrative	Rock Musical	Compilation Score	Event Film	Tour Film	Rise and Fall Film	Other
1995			- Empire Records				
1996					- Hard Core Logo	- That Thing You Do!	
1997					- Jane's Addiction: Three Days		- Spice World
1998	- Blues Brothers 2000					- Velvet Goldmine	
1999			- Detroit Rock City				
2000			- High Fidelity		- Almost Famous	- The Filth and the Fury	
2001						- Hedwig and the Angry Inch - Rockstar - Down and Out With the Dolls - The Clash: Westway to the World	
2002				- I Am Trying to Break Your Heart		- Standing in the Shadows of Motown	
2003					- Just An American Boy	- Prey For Rock & Roll - School of Rock	

Date	Jukebox Narrative	Rock Musical	Compilation Score	Event Film	Tour Film	Rise and Fall Film	Other
2004					- Metallica: Some Kind of Monster		

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