

MUS 15: David Bowie

Section Meeting 4

Monday, February 1, 2021

Meeting Outline

1. Opening Song: *Across the Universe*
2. Announcements
3. Student Question: Aladdin Sane
4. Paper 1
5. Conversation about Module 4
6. Discussion
7. Questions

Opening Song:

Across the Universe

Announcements

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- Discussion 3 is DUE by tonight, [Feb 1](#) at 11:59 pm.
- Discussion 4 is DUE by next Monday, [Feb 8](#) at 11:59 pm.
- Paper 1 is DUE by next Thursday, [Feb 11](#) at 11:59 pm.
- All other Unit 1 assignments are DUE by Thursday, [Feb 11](#) at 6:30 pm.
These include the weekly in-module assignments and the end-of-unit test.
- I added some notes that I took for Modules 1-4 to the section webpage. I hope it helps you study for the upcoming test.

Student Question: Aladdin Sane

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- How is the Aladdin Sane character related to Ziggy Stardust? Is it basically the same character, i.e. an alien sent to Earth to save humanity with rock music?
 - *Professor Babin: “Aladdin Sane is really just the getup invented for the cover of the album. It was recorded and came out during the ‘Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders From Mars’ tour. Whatever people might have wanted to read into it, the non-musical part of the show didn’t change much (the music part got better and better as the band played more and they changed song lists, etc). The last show of the Ziggy tour and the last show featuring the Spiders [the show depicted in the movie on the course reserves] was shot 4 months after Aladdin Sane came out and the costumes, etc, were still effectively the same. Bowie superfans tend to strongly associate musical periods with the costumes/personas rather than the other way around. The whole 1972-73 period was firmly planted in the ‘rock is the message’ idea, whether or not people thought of it as part of a story about aliens, or whether it was an aesthetic throwback to a ‘simpler’ time when the US/UK economies weren’t crumbling and there was no Vietnam War.”*

Paper 1

Paper 1: Some things to consider

- **If you're feeling stuck, try to find out more about each artist and song.**
 - Who were the artists (i.e. their personal backgrounds, influences, motivations, etc)?
 - What kind of music did they write and why?
 - Were the songs related to current events?
 - What were those events and what were the artists trying to say with their music?
 - How were the events similar and how were they different?
 - What musical genre or style do each of the songs belong to?
 - How do the two songs sound similar (i.e. melody, instruments, audio effects, etc)?
 - How do the two songs sound different?
 - Do you think the artists were being authentic when they performed the songs?
 - Do you think the artists were being creative? Why or why not?
- You're allowed to talk about songs that aren't included on the lists; however, **your main focus should be on the two songs you chose from the lists.**

Conversation about Module 4

Conversation about Module 4

- **Module 4 covered the following key topics:**
 - Bowie's transition from Ziggy Stardust to the Thin White Duke
 - The *Diamond Dogs* tour and Bowie's fascination with Philly soul music
 - Bowie's personal, social, and artistic experiences living in LA
 - His albums *Young Americans* and *Station To Station*
- **There was one assigned film (*Cracked Actor*) and one assigned reading (Ch. 13 of *David Bowie: Critical Perspectives*)**

Discussion

Discussion: Week 4

- Please address the following topic for Discussion 4:

- As we talked about in class, there are two sides of the argument about whether Bowie's playing of Philly soul music was a good thing or a bad thing. One side says that he's letting the musicians do all of the work and is using them as a kind of authenticity prop while he's getting the credit but does something that isn't really authentic. The other side says that Bowie is playing Philly soul music because he loved that style of music so much that he had to do his own thing with it in collaboration with people that were as into it as him. As Greg Tate said, "On *Young Americans*, you hear a white rock star who didn't want to be read as a mere tourist in Blackonia but as a contributor, a collaborator, and ultimately a real comrade." Tate also said that "Bowie remains that rarity—a white rock artist whose appropriations of black kulcha never felt like a rip-off but more like a sharing of radical and bumptious ideations between like-minded freaks."

What is your opinion about Bowie's actions specifically and about this sort of thing generally? Are there other examples that you can think of that fall on either side of the equation—the good or the bad?

Discussion: Week 4

- To earn full credit for this assignment, your post must be at least 250 words long, and you must provide a 2-3 sentence response to at least one other student's post.
- *In your response to the other student, please be supportive by providing constructive feedback.*

Discussion: Some ideas to get you thinking

- How does Bowie's playing of African American music compare with Lonnie Donegan's? Some might argue Donegan wasn't knowingly being disrespectful because he was English and saw Lead Belly's music differently than Americans saw it. However, is there a way in which Bowie's playing is more authentic than Donegan's? Do think Bowie provides a good example of how artists should use ideas from other people?
 - [Fame](#) by David Bowie
 - [Rock Island Line](#) by Lonnie Donegan
- Are there other artists you can think of who used music or musical styles from other people or cultures in ways that were either ethical/commendable or unethical/inappropriate? Please do your best to give the artists a fair analysis.

Questions