

Nostalgia and Renewal:  
The Soundtracks of *Rushmore* and *High Fidelity*

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## Abstract

This thesis is an analysis of two film soundtracks, *High Fidelity* and *Rushmore*, and how each conforms to, and moves away from, trends in soundtrack production. The analysis begins by examining the relationship between film and music through the progression of key figures and moments leading to the current state of the film soundtrack. The soundtracks of *High Fidelity* and *Rushmore* are situated within the contexts of youth and rock culture as a means of illuminating their compilations and prospective audiences. The conclusion of this thesis is that these particular films and their soundtracks are entrenched in a dialogue about nostalgia and the superiority of archival music and provide clear examples of the growing use of nostalgia within cultural contexts generally.

## Résumé

Cette thèse analyse à partir de deux trames sonores, provenant des films *High Fidelity* et *Rushmore*, comment celles-ci suivent ou bien s'éloignent des tendances qui orientent la production de trames sonores. L'analyse part de la relation entre le film et la musique, vue à travers le développement progressif des personnages principaux et des moments critiques qui déterminent la nature actuelle de la trame sonore. Les trames sonores des films *High Fidelity* et *Rushmore* s'inscrivent dans le contexte de la culture *rock* et du culte de la *jeunesse* afin d'en dresser le catalogue et de situer leur public éventuel. La conclusion de cette analyse est que ces deux films et leurs trames sonores sont intimement liés à un discours de la nostalgie et de la supériorité de la musique de cette époque, et qu'ils apportent des exemples frappants sur la manière de tirer partie de *la nostalgie* en général dans divers contextes culturels.

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## Introduction

I have always had a strong appreciation and fondness for film soundtracks. This is due, in part, to the way songs and movies make me feel both separately and during the cinematic moments when they occur together. The associations are so pleasurable or significant that they create a desire to recapture such moments of aural and visual overlap. Another element contributing to my appreciation for soundtracks is merely the enjoyment of the compilation of music itself, a separate cultural product unrelated to the films, as exemplified in the art of "the mix tape". Upon examining my own collection of soundtracks, I recognized that, more often than not, the soundtracks are compiled of older music including R & B, Folk, and Rock and Roll. Many of these soundtracks still evoke images or moments from their corresponding films, such as *Dazed and Confused*, *Trainspotting*, and *The Royal Tenenbaums*.

It has become overwhelmingly evident that popular music and films have formed a lasting relationship. Songs in film have traditionally been used as a tool for enhancing emotional scenes or easing tension, as an ironic subtext, or as a way to juxtapose action and meaning. Furthermore, the majority of blockbuster films today have come to rely on songs to bring scenes together, narrate certain events, and carry the plot of the film. The use of popular songs has become so predictable and expected, especially within romantic comedies and action films, that the songs completely overtake the film, displacing dialogue or indicating the passage of time. The incorporation of the music video effect or montage into the film has become a recognized and all too common technique to compensate for weak plots, empty dialogue, and ritualized scene structures. Despite this

overuse and abuse of popular songs in film, there are nonetheless film gems that implement music in an original and subtle manner. The formal devices of the music video may still be used within films, but they are no longer quite so overstated or expected and sometimes are not immediately recognizable. It is these films and their soundtracks that I would like to acknowledge and analyze, and on whose success I would like to speculate.

It is my contention that soundtracks are successful when one can discern a creative logic in the selection of songs to accompany particular scenes. This is particularly apparent when, upon listening to the music separate from the film, one can still imagine the moments in which the music appears, or perhaps even return to the feelings evoked by the film. The song choice itself then makes absolute sense and the overall selection of music is easily understood. For example, the music of *Dazed and Confused* efficiently suggests the context and historical period of the film, which is set in the '70s. *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*, a film set in the 1930s in the South, features blue grass music full of resonances of that time and place. Dipping into the musical archives is an obvious choice for such films where the time is set crucial to the narrative. It is perhaps less evident, however, why some films set in the present have chosen to revive music of thirty to forty years ago. The soundtracks of *Rushmore* and *High Fidelity* are examples of this phenomenon.

For this thesis, I analyze these two films and their soundtracks. Both films have had successful runs, successful soundtracks, and have produced loyal followings each in its own way. Several pop culture magazines such as *Rolling Stone Magazine* and *The New Yorker* have discussed Wes Anderson's *Rushmore* (1998) with respect to the

accompaniment and support of both character development and storytelling by rock music from the sixties and seventies. Stephen Frears' *High Fidelity* (2000) has received slightly less acclaim and recognition. Nevertheless, the film itself actualizes the importance of music, its function, and relationship to popular culture through its narrative, dialogue and soundtrack. The soundtrack brings together musicians and their music from the '60s and '70s with contemporary artists whose music is also able to incur a sense of nostalgia usually evoked by older music.

Nostalgia is one of the key components common to both films and their soundtracks. For the purpose of this thesis, it is important to expand the definition of nostalgia, as younger generations of listeners and viewers do not associate the music they hear in the film with its original release and context because the music was created before their time. Thus the summoning of nostalgia here does not comply with postcolonial or theoretical definitions of the term. These conceptualizations of nostalgia often involve a longing for return or original subjective memories (Boym, 2001). However, longing does still play a part. Rather than longing for another time, it is now for an imagined state of being that is produced by the film and the music. It is this function of what I consider "inauthentic nostalgia" that is illustrated by *Rushmore* and *High Fidelity*, and that is also becoming a primary theme within popular and/or mainstream culture today. The proliferation of fabricated nostalgia functions as a binding device, forming peer groups of viewers and listeners. I will discuss the group formation of subcultures and communities in Chapter 2.

The revitalization of the past and the success of retrograde styles are growing phenomena that are visible in an abundance of cultural sites: fashion, décor, music, film,



art, etc. The creation of a taste-culture that is centered on the past may involve both an appreciation for what came before, and an admonition for what presently exists. For music in particular, this fixation on the past also encourages its classification and categorization within the evolution of various kinds of music. Archival knowledge defines this younger generation of appreciators – a sub or taste culture that celebrates nostalgia and older music and artists. I designate this audience as retro or nostalgic and will explain how the films analyzed in this thesis are supported and surrounded by a large community of taste-makers and followers.

The research is organized into chapters that articulate the adjoining of music and movie audiences through the examination of the soundtrack. In order to provide a comprehensive understanding of the soundtrack, I trace its roots and chronicle its progression in Chapter 1. Soundtrack trends involving composition, theme song and later popular song, articulate key moments of shifts in soundtrack composition and the unavoidable integration of popular musicians in the film industry. The historical association of composers and film companies informs the current relationship between popular musicians and film soundtracks. As music artists are associated with defined genres of music, soundtracks and their films are therefore pre-categorized according to a particular style and audience.

The discussions surrounding taste culture and audience relate to the significant role that cultures play in processes of identification and group alignment and will be examined in Chapters 2 and 3. Taste and self-representation influence the ways in which we define music as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ and as ‘authentic’ or ‘inauthentic’. Youth culture is inexorably involved in “finding oneself”, positioning oneself among the masses,

exploring likes and dislikes, and finding others with whom one can share those feelings. Feelings of alienation, loss, and uncertainty are identifiable markers of both youth and rock communities and therefore translate into films that embody the elements of rock and youth culture. Taking into account the function of nostalgia thus helps to qualify the soundtracks discussed in this thesis, and what they might symbolize and accomplish (within taste culture).

*High Fidelity* and *Rushmore* are films that resonate with ideals of taste and subculture. This is revealed in their subject matters, themes, dialogue, characters, and music. It is critical to thoroughly deconstruct the various themes and elements of *High Fidelity* and *Rushmore* and the overlaps of nostalgia created via the music and the film content to understand how these films situate themselves within larger discussions of taste and audience.

Thus the purpose of this thesis is to acknowledge two films whose soundtracks deviate from current trends in soundtrack production. This is confirmed by the way the films implement historic and dated music in a manner that is revitalizing and fresh. The choice of such music in itself is innovative, despite the proliferation of nostalgia and retro found in various other cultural sites. Despite this minor conformity, the music in these films goes beyond nostalgia for nostalgia's sake without getting lost in the ongoing commercialization of the past and of kitsch. Instead, issues of community, identity formation, and taste become enmeshed with what will be seen as sort of pseudo-authentic nostalgia in the films *High Fidelity* and *Rushmore*, and their soundtracks.

## **Chapter 1: The History of the Soundtrack**

In this chapter I will chronicle the relationship between music and film and examine its obstacles and innovations. The evolution of the relationship between film and music has not only spawned the creation of several cultural industries, but has also generated theories and philosophies that study image, sound, perception, technology, affect, and meaning. In order to appreciate the contributions of soundtracks to films, it is important to first trace the history of the film soundtrack, and how it has progressed over the years. While there have been numerous trends and changes that have transformed film music, this chapter will focus on several stages in the history of film music: the illustrated song, “classical” film music, the musical film, the rise of the movie song, the rock and roll soundtrack, and the compilation album. I focus on these stages in the history of film music to draw a clear and distinct map from music’s first inception into film to its role in movies today. Each of these trends has had implications for film music, and together these changes have allowed for new meaning and complexity to be created in the layering of music and film.

### *Sound and Vision*

Before entering into an examination of film music, it is important to clarify the position of sound in film, in particular, the relationship between sound and vision. Film theorist, Edward Branigan (1997), explains how sound can function in two very different ways. Firstly, sound can be perceived as coming from an object within the cinematic image. For example, a character in a film might turn on the radio and music will begin

to play, indicating that the sound is truly coming from the radio. However, sound is also able to call up an image. For instance, street sounds that are heard during an interior scene call to mind images of the metropolis, but the hustle and bustle of the busy city do not appear as an image to the viewer. "On this account, sound does not possess an absolute quality; it is measured only with respect to a way of knowing. Thus a sound may be heard as part of a spoken word, or heard as an object sound, or heard as music" (Branigan, 1997, p. 109).

Within film, the connections between sound and image can be manipulated and can call into question hierarchies of sensory perception, i.e. "am I hearing what I am seeing, or am I seeing what I am hearing?" Acknowledgment of the variable relationships of sound to image works against a generalizing account of sound and image as equal or as always relating within a fixed hierarchy.

Some perceptual processes operate upon data from the loudspeakers (and data appearing on the screen) primarily in a direct, 'bottom-up' manner by examining the data in very brief periods of time (with little or no associated memory) and organizing it automatically into such features as aural pitch, loudness, edge, depth, motion, size, shape, colour, text, and so on... Other perceptual processes, however, based on acquired knowledge, memory, and schemas (frames, scripts), are not constrained by stimulus time, and work primarily 'top-down' on the data using a spectator's expectations and goals as principals of organization. These goals of the spectator may be considerably broader than answering such existential questions as what and where things are. (Branigan, 1997, p. 105)

Direct and indirect perceptions of sound generate different readings of time, both according to the present on-screen action and motion, and to the off-screen referential data. An example of sound being used as a reference device might involve a close-up on a character's face accompanied by sounds of screams and screeching brakes. These sounds would recall a car accident without taking the audience through the actual events

of the accident. The world of the characters can therefore go beyond the screen without altering the on-screen images.

The flexibility of sound and its capacity for referentiality encourages different relations between sound and the dominant narrative. Some films repeat sounds that have already been used but do not match the onscreen action, calling into memory an earlier frame. In the same way, music can either support the narrative or pose as an oppositional subtext generating layered meanings. Although Branigan's work mainly attends to sound rather than music, his basic concepts regarding the ways in which sound is able or unable to infiltrate the image translate to music and film.

#### *The Illustrated Song and "Classical" Music*

Music first became part of the experience of film in the so-called 'silent era'. Film music was initially created to cover the noise from the projectors. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, musical accompaniment to film resembled musical accompaniment to vaudeville acts. It was performed by a small band in the pit to accompany the action on screen or stage. The early silent films at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century always had musical accompaniment and the musicians were primarily keyboard players with an aptitude for improvisation. Rick Altman (2001) recounts the history of the soundtrack by examining the illustrated song, first invented in the 1890s as part of Nickelodeon pictures. Altman's discussion of the illustrated song, in essence the synchronization of slides and theme music, establishes a historical point in the progression of the relationship between film and music.

Nickelodeon pictures relied not only on live music, but also on illustrated songs. “As façade photographs readily attest, the highlight of many Nickelodeon programs was the illustrated song, a live entertainment featuring a popular song illustrated by colorful lantern slides” (Altman, 2001, p.19). The songs were typically composed of two verses, sung by a hired performer, and two choruses, sung by the audience when prompted by a chorus-lyrics slide on the screen. Nickelodeon illustrated songs allowed audiences to participate in the movie experience. The songs also provided a distraction while the film canister was being changed (Altman, 2001). Illustrated song slides were popular until 1913, when slides left the theatre house and the use of two film projectors came into existence. The illustrated song has been largely disregarded in attempts to reconstruct century-old film programs. However, their existence and implementation are evidence of the most basic relationship between song lyrics and filmic images. The slides that accompanied the illustrated songs involved a literal relationship between the lyrics and the image. The illustrated song represents cinema’s earliest attachment to popular song.

Altman next undertakes the critical task of separating and defining popular song and film scoring. He refers to film scores as “classical” music, with an emphasis on the quotation marks to signify the difference between “classical” film music, and classical referring to opera and the art song. “Classical” film music is generally characterized by repetition and recurring leitmotifs that represent characters and situations. “For the purpose of a comparison with popular song, it is essential to recognize the fundamental muteness, indeterminacy, inconspicuousness, and expansibility of ‘classical’ music” (2001, p. 23). “Classical” music offers the illusion that the music is authentically and directly generated by the image, whereas popular songs are unmistakably authored and

produced outside of the film text. The transient quality of “classical” film music hides the existence of the composer and sutures the music into the image. Despite the fact that “classical” music offers the illusion that it originates within the onscreen action and lacks an original source or author, film composers received acclaim and recognition for establishing an identifiable canon of film music.

Some music theorists like Patricia Barlow (2001) have described popular song and “classical” film music as being in direct opposition to genuine classical music because of their propensity for popularity and mainstream appeal. However, these two types of music are not distinct and separate. They have been interwoven for some time. One example of a crossover between classical and popular music may be found in the work of composer Richard Wagner, whose operas have been used in *Birth of a Nation* (1915), *Daffy Duck in Hollywood* (1938), and *Apocalypse Now* (1979). A further categorization of classical music as “light classical” indicates the popularity of particular pieces of classical music that have become well known as background music in advertisements, on film soundtracks, and regularly heard on radio stations. The newfound popularity of many classical pieces, easier to relate to because of their commercial accessibility and mass appeal, transforms the music from highbrow to middlebrow (Barlow, 2001). Examples of light classical music include *Canon in D*, the Three Tenors, *Flight of the Bumblebee*, and many others.

Thus, in some way, this kind of light classical music can be considered popular, because it has become classical music for the masses. The result is a hybrid category that shares characteristics of both classical and popular music, and which has existed, uneasily at times, for approximately a century. (Barlow, 2001, p. 34)

While light classical music has lost cultural status over the last century, it regained some respectability when it became central to the movie score in the 1920s and 1930s. The

influx of existing popular songs into film soundtracks, beginning in the 1950s, further enhanced the status of light classical music, as it came to be seen as more "serious" in comparison to these popular songs.

Silent films originally relied on classical music because of the abundance of existing music to select from. Furthermore, scoring a silent film to existing classical music added sophistication and cultural worth to early films (Barlow, 2001). But why did music persist in film with the advent of the "talkies" and sound film?

### *Early Functions of Film Music*

Although music first accompanied the silent film and the illustrated slide, it does not rationally follow that it should maintain its equal position in the sound film, where technically complicated sound effects and speech were just beginning to be heard. The presence of background music, as external to the image and onscreen action, is a trend in need of examination and explanation. Film music is generally the only sound that does not emanate logically from the screen. However, spectators easily and often pleasurably accept its appearance. Music's persistence into the sound film is best understood by acknowledging its capacities to accomplish a multitude of functions. Claudia Gorbman (2002) says that music is able to create a myriad of viewing experiences:

It's freedom from the explicitness of language or photographic images, its useful denotative and expressive values easily comprehended by listeners raised in the nineteenth-century orchestral tradition, its malleability, its spatial, rhythmic, and temporal values, give it a special and complex status in the narrative film experience. (p. 39)

Film music can serve certain extremely utilitarian roles: easing tension and anxiety, enhancing dramatic moments, expressing emotions, etc. However, its



effectiveness depends upon its capacity to be ignored. For this reason, film music has regularly been compared to easy-listening music. This comparison is validated by the music's propensity for pleasure and ability to lull spectators into a position of watching rather than a position of questioning. "The bath or gel of affect in which music immerses film narrative is like easy-listening music in that it rounds out the sharp edges, smooths roughnesses, masks contradictions, and masks spatial or temporal discontinuity with its own sonic and harmonic continuity" (Gorbman, 2002, p. 41). Film music also serves as emotional or action cues, indicating what is about to happen. It is able to convey historical and geographical setting and, when successful, anchor the image in meaning. Film music can smooth over technological shifts, support the editing of the film, and aid its flow and continuity. Ideally, film music contributes to the "movie magic," paralleling and supporting the discourse, characters and action (Gorbman, 2002).

Gorbman focuses mainly on the function of music as a support mechanism. While I agree with Gorbman's analysis of easy-listening film music, I find she overlooks the divergent uses of music that have transformed the concept of the soundtrack and film score. It is therefore necessary to move beyond a discussion of music and narrative parallels to appreciate music's varied contributions to the film experience. These are only some initial arguments for the perseverance of film music and its potential, for it will later be seen in this chapter that music has the capacity to do much more than reinforce the emotional undertones of a filmic moment.

## *Movie Music Makers*

By 1919, theatre houses recognized the benefits of combining instrumentalization and sound effects. Full orchestras were tucked into band pits, and the appearance of the drum set expanded the possibilities for sound accompaniment. However when sound pictures began to emerge and take precedence over silent film in the late twenties, production studios invested in recording equipment that could support the large sound that had become crucial to film music compositions. “All over Hollywood, teams of carpenters and technicians were put on payroll to turn stages into soundstages – usually warehouse-like structures that could contain sound equipment and muffle external noise during film-making” (Mamorstein, 1997, p. 29). Live accompaniment vanished upon the realization that there was more room for sound manipulation with recorded music. Any work to be found for composers, conductors and musicians became centralized in California as theatre houses were transformed into movie houses (Mamorstein, 1997).

The songwriters of Tin Pan Alley eventually affiliated themselves with movie studios, first exploited by Warners and soon after by many other production houses (Mamorstein, 1997). Tin Pan Alley was a nickname given to a street in Manhattan where the offices of many music publishers were located. It eventually became the generic term for all publishers of popular American sheet music. Between the years 1928 and 1929, a lot of money was made for musicians in the movie business, despite shifting trends in the size and spectacle of film production. Los Angeles filled with musicians from all over the country. But only a handful were hired to compose scores, and among those few, the fathers of film composition arose. Music departments were occupied by

recording supervisors, music librarians, orchestrators and musical directors (Mamorstein, 1997).

Composers increasingly understood that lyrics could make pieces of film music memorable, and memorable songs could contribute to the success of films. Many unions formed in an effort to establish rights for musicians and composers, including the American Society of Arrangers, the American Guild of Musical Artists, and “white” and “coloured” unions. The rise of unions within the music industries helped to stabilize musical composition and performance. During this same period composers acquired greater recognition for their contributions to film, and higher royalty payments from Hollywood’s power film houses (Mamorstein, 1997). In the early 1930s, the intimate relationship between Hollywood and the music industries appeared to be fully established, as a wave of musicals and musical revues seemed to dominate the cinema. (Mamorstein, 1997).

By 1932, however, critics and audiences began to complain of an overproduction of musicals, and the use of musical numbers in film came to be seen as almost gratuitous. Almost immediately, there was a shift to non-musical films, in which music was used to underscore the narrative rather than as the backdrop to song-and-dance numbers. Then, as the Depression deepened, the musical returned in the mid-1930s in what is commonly thought of as a turn towards escapist forms of entertainment.

### *Crooners and the Movie Musical*

The radio popularity of the crooners of the 1930s caught the attention of Hollywood’s filmmakers who quickly incorporated the crooner style into the production

of film musicals. The rise of crooners in the late '20s and early '30s marked the evolution of vocal music and performance. The popularity of solo performance has been attributed to the developments of amplification, the microphone and electronic recording.

Amplifiers, developed during the 1910s, made it possible to magnify weak signals without significant distortion. The sensitive condenser microphone (a word that literally means "small sound") appeared in 1922; it helped give clarity and smoothness to the singer's voice while further reducing the noise level or distortion. Finally, the development of electrical as opposed to acoustic recording in 1924-25 made it possible to reproduce the range and complexity of sounds heard by the human ear much more accurately. (McCracken, 2001, p. 110)

These new technologies allowed for softer voices to travel across large spaces and to convey an intimate and conversational tone, which would come to be known as "crooning." This period of film production is critical because gender codes established for sound and image during this time determined the evolution of both American popular song and the American musical film. The first male singers to become renowned as crooners were Rudy Vallee and Bing Crosby (McCracken, 2001).

Male crooners appealed primarily to women. When Vallee and Bing first appeared in films, they filled a romantic role, framed for the idyllic interest of female viewers. Their early films celebrated the crooner style, molded by romantic comedy and witty dialogue. *Vagabond Lover* (1929), *Too Much Harmony* (1933), and *The Big Broadcast* (1932) established the dominance of crooning songs in the films of the '30s and early '40s. The male voice was central to these musical films, and the crooners of this time represent an important stage in the relationship of sound and image as well as body and voice (McCracken, 2001). As such, the crooner is one of the historical figures predating the appearance of the rock and roll singer and song in film.

### *Popular Film Music and Themes*

It is important to note here that "movie music" became a form of popular music, through its styles, mass appeal and commercial dissemination. First and foremost, movie music is music written specifically for film. The popular style of movie music does not occlude orchestral scoring, but rather incorporates popular music as its main stylistic element. In the 1950s and early 1960s, popular music film scores generally borrowed their themes from the Tin Pan Alley traditions but the normal orchestrations were still a kind of light classical. In addition, popular film scores also took their cues from the film's narrative and characters. The music of most of the films of this time therefore: provided the atmosphere of time and place, supported the feelings of the characters, served as filler and continuity to the editing, and finally, enhanced the action when required and brought the scene to a sense of finality (Smith, 1998).

In the 1940s and '50s, increased television ownership and viewing led to a decline in movie-going. In response, the radio became a worthy ally of film studios by regularly playing movie songs and advertising movies. In 1952, *Do not Forsake Me* by Tex Ritter served as excellent publicity for *High Noon*. This is an extremely important period in the history of film music, as the movie song clearly provided added value to the picture. It became evident very quickly that a song could promote a film, and the film could subsequently be advertised through musical associations on jukeboxes and radios. This revelation inspired the trend of movie songs written for non-musical films. Live performance had been turned over to the television industry while radio became increasingly reliant on recorded music and the talents of a disc jockey (Mamorstein, 1997).

In the 1950s, the popular score's emphasis on song forms, for example the twelve-bar blues form of jazz, suited its translation to popular album. Jazz inspired scores were a new trend in film music and implemented popular songs at certain points in the film, and what was perceived as freer rhythms. In comparison to "classical" music, pop scores utilized "freer rhythmic inflection, a greater emphasis on syncopation, and a less strict sense of vertical harmonic and rhythmic synchronization" (Smith, 1998, p. 8), as well as a unique approach to timbre. The use of personalized timbres, as opposed to "classical" music's demand for proper pitch, phrasing, and dynamics, etc., distinguished the pop score's sound, and not its form. To be clear, the popular score is not synonymous with the popular song. However, the pop score figures predominantly on the road towards the popular song soundtrack (Smith, 1998).

The relationship between record companies and film studios was transformed and strengthened with the emergence of the theme song, and both industries exploited each other's successes quite comfortably. Capitol Records, for example, moved quickly to invest in movie theme songs and to attempt to secure singers and writers for the movie studios with whom they collaborated. Doris Day became the most important female movie singer of the 1950s (Mamorstein, 1997). Songs like *It's Magic* for the film, *The Time, The Place and the Girl* (1946) and *Secret Love* for the film *Calamity Jane* (1953) immediately became number one singles. *Black Orpheus'* exotic score brought the focus of the movie music market to an international scale in 1959, and artists outside movie studios were signed to score many films (Mamorstein, 1997).

Another component of the pop score has been its accessibility and its propensity for popularity. To achieve this, the pop score has relied on the immediacy or currency of

popular styles of music. Therefore the 1950s use of jazz and later, the 1970s employment of funk and disco, were commonsensical to viewers (Smith, 1998). Today, the score's marketability still depends on its formulaic familiarity to the audience.

The cultural currency of the music used within pop scores has allowed these scores, and the albums which convey them, to survive beyond the textual confines of the film and its theatrical viewing. Cultural theorist Jeff Smith (1998) notes that, "the emphasis on melody, the repetitiveness of harmonic and rhythmic patterns, and the relative brevity of the pieces suggest that pop forms are especially well suited to the memory constraints and cognitive limitations of a musically untrained audience" (p. 15). Thus the pop score has had to constantly negotiate between its potential for commercial success, and its function as film music. However there may perhaps be little tension between these positions, as in the case of celebrated composers of movie music, Henry Mancini and John Barry.

The scores of composer Henri Mancini encouraged the convergence of movie music and popular musical forms, and regularly contained popular songs written for films. The scores written for *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961), *Peter Gunn* (1958), and *The Pink Panther* (1963) implemented a variety of distinct themes. They involved recognizable melodies that transcended the screen to become collectible soundtracks. Mancini's multi-theme approach created a soundtrack wherein each track was able to stand alone, as it began and ended within itself, bearing a striking resemblance to the format of pop song albums. Mancini recognized the importance of creating a soundtrack that translated to an album. Despite the desire to create an album, the importance of the

theme song to the film was not overlooked, but instead maintained its critical position as the voice of the film, as a movie song essentially does (Smith, 1998).

Like Mancini, John Barry also contributed to the archives of thematic movie music. Writing music for several *James Bond* pictures, Barry's employment of recurring leitmotifs provided the films with a series of recognizable melodies instantly associated with the pictures. The reinforcement of title songs throughout the Bond films bound the music to the film and vice versa. The James Bond film soundtracks have had enormously successful independent lives as albums and as the basis for sheet music sales. Songs like *Goldfinger* and *Live and Let Die* have received wide commercial success both in album sales and on radio charts. The film music of the 1960s came to be defined by developments such as these: by the use of multiple popular themes in the soundtracks of Henri Mancini and by the clear establishment of movie themes, as in the James Bond films (Smith, 1998). The movie song and the "rock and roll musical" helped to pave the way for soundtracks, such as the compilation albums of the 1980s, which consisted primarily of pre-released songs.

### *The Rock and Roll Musical*

In 1955, the film *Blackboard Jungle* featured *Rock Around the Clock* by Bill Haley and the Comets. The symbiotic relationship between a movie and a previously-released hit rock or popular song was made abundantly clear. What emerged almost instantaneously was a series of films showcasing the talents of various musicians. These films included *Rock Around the Clock* (1956) and *High School Confidential* (1958), to name two. The variety of performance styles from crooner and chanteuse to rock



musician, enhanced the films' appeal to adolescents and adults alike. These showcases were the foundation of the compilation soundtrack, as a wide array of performers and songs found their way onto the film's soundtrack. The "rock and roll musical" followed shortly thereafter.

Little Richard, The Platters, Fats Domino and Abbey Lincoln were just some of the performers who appeared in *The Girl Can't Help It* (1956), one of the first films representing the rock and roll musical, a genre that was later dominated by Elvis Presley. *Loving You* (1956) and *Jailhouse Rock* (1957) showcased Elvis Presley as the essence of rock and roll. The sale of soundtrack albums featuring a single musician or performer was easy inasmuch as to purchase these soundtracks was essentially to buy an Elvis Presley record. Consequently, this revelation meant that the narratives of these films served as more of a pretext to encourage musical performance, rather than telling a real story (Mamorstein, 1997).

The rock and roll musical embraced the band in the same way that it embraced the solo performer. The already growing Beatles phenomenon intensified with their movie *A Hard Day's Night* (1964), complementing the tradition of the rock and roll or jukebox musical. In the film, a fictional day in the life of the band is depicted with scenes of the band playing, rehearsing, and being chased by the police. This style of storytelling was mimicked in *Ferry Cross the Mersey* (1965) and *Having a Wild Weekend* (1965), two of many British films portraying the swinging life of London. However, these films lacked the mass appeal of the Beatles, instead featuring bands such as The Dave Clark Five and the Pacemakers (Mamorstein, 1997). This trend of filmmaking eventually gave way to the compilation soundtrack, wherein popular songs prevailed.

### *The Compilation Soundtrack*

Jeff Smith (1998) explains that “the compilation score emerges as a curious hybrid of the musical and the traditional classical Hollywood score. Like the musical, each song of the compilation score retains a certain measure of structural unity and integrity” (p. 155). However, rather than maintaining continuity, each song is used as a way of establishing mood and atmosphere, or as an aural commentary. Furthermore, the compilation score often relies on references that may be external to the images; references that are embedded in the songs. This encourages the use of allusion, juxtaposition, and lyrical parallels. Thus the appearance of the song can serve a number of functions and retain a number of various meanings. “In other words, because of the compilation score’s heavy reliance on pop and rock tunes, its meaning within a film is often dependent upon the meaning of pop music in the larger spheres of society and culture,” (Smith, 1998, p. 155).

The utility of the compilation soundtrack can also be examined in terms of economic and strategic marketing factors. The market’s focus on new rock and pop culture has encouraged soundtracks and films to be promoted simultaneously in very much the same way as the movie song of the ‘50s. For example, teen pictures address adolescent themes through their narrative content as well as their assemblage of music. Moreover, it has been found that the higher the number of featured songs, the higher the success of the film’s soundtrack. The inclination towards previously-released songs has meant that production houses began turning away from the musicians and

composers of Tin Pan Alley, and looking to rock and pop stars to arrange the albums (Smith, 2001).

In the United States, the eventual disappearance of the rock and roll musical allowed the opportunity for different kinds of music and film relationships to be forged. Rock, and eventually funk, disco and punk entered the movie scene. As films continued to be concerned with youthful alienation, through the late 1960s and beyond, rock music was regularly used to support their social commentary. *The Graduate* (1967) was immersed in the sounds of Simon and Garfunkel and is an excellent example of how a band or artist's sound can wholly envelop a film. In the same way that rock defined many of the 1960s youth films, the relationship between funk and black urban crime thrillers became a trend of the early 1970s, showcasing the talents of Isaac Hayes and Curtis Mayfield in *Shaft* (1971) and *Superfly* (1972). In the latter half of the 1970s, disco music accompanied many films, such as the Bee Gees' *Saturday Night Fever* score (1977). In the 1970s, as well, The Sex Pistols, The Clash and The New York Dolls, among others, came to represent the sentiments of youth alienation in film and youth culture, because the attitude of punk groups resonated with this generation (Marmorstein, 1997). These shifting trends are evidence that the relationship between film genres and music genres is highly fluid and interrelated. This reality has not changed much since the 1980s; as bands and artists move in and out of the mainstream, the overlaps between music, film, and youth culture remain an important sign of the times.

### *Soundtrack Trends of the Last Twenty Years*

As noted, the roles of popular musicians, film composers, and music supervisors have become increasingly intertwined and the boundaries between them blurred. Indeed, the soundtracks of several films have been arranged and written by rock, pop and hip hop musicians. The transition from rock performer to music supervisor or film music composer dates back to the 1970s. This crossover is partially explained by the ability of performers to appeal to a particular audience, namely the youth market. As well, the role of film composer provides the artist with an extension of a tenuous music career. (Toop, 1995). Excellent examples of successful career crossovers include Mark Mothersbaugh, former member of Devo turned music supervisor and composer for all four of Wes Anderson's films, and the RZA of Wu-Tang Clan, composer for the *Kill Bill* (2003/4) movies. As will be seen in chapters 3 and 4, the soundtracks of both *High Fidelity* (2000) and *Rushmore* (1998) exemplify an original use of rock music in film.

Although Rob Tannenbaum (1985) acknowledges that successful compilation soundtracks existed before 1985, he claims that it was during this year that rock and roll bands and popular musicians took a visibly increased interest in establishing their place within film. If 1985 may be considered a pivotal year in the development of the film soundtrack, it is because this year confirmed the success of the soundtrack based primarily on songs previously recorded for other purposes. Tannenbaum writes that the success of a film may not be dependent upon the success of the soundtrack, or vice versa, but a strong soundtrack remains attached to the film and will encourage moviegoers to enjoy the film.

The shift in soundtrack production from the 1980s and '90s to the present has been towards a more artistic and subject-relevant soundtrack. The role of the soundtrack

has been to target the film's audience, with a well-conceived song selection that does not necessarily focus on an original hit or title song. With this goal in mind, the soundtrack industry is then able to promote new and less recognizable artists alongside established musicians (Callaghan, 2002). Tamara Conniff and Carla Hay (2002) address the importance of finding artists for a soundtrack who conform to a particular demographic. They certify that soundtracks that include songs inspired by films are becoming almost obsolete. Instead, the memory or emotion triggered by a song linked to the movie gives it value. The character of the music is enmeshed with the film itself. However Conniff and Hay do not acknowledge the contemporary films that rely not only on previously-released music, but existing music from thirty to forty years ago. In this they lack the scope to understand the popularity of retro soundtracks that I contend go beyond such a formulaic relationship between film and music.

### *The Layer Effect*

Generally speaking, compilation soundtracks are comprised of songs that have already been released instead of original songs composed for film. Arguments have been made for and against the use of this music. Some believe that previously-released songs bring with them too many references and associations to work effectively within films. They argue that a song's emotional and dramatic content, created as they were for other contexts, might interfere with their placement and meaning within a film. On the other hand, songs can successfully and advantageously reference themes, times and trends. The use of musical allusions might serve to clarify universal themes and situations. The subjects of love, loss, and good times are regular themes of film and

music alike. A song's capacity to reference can also be expanded beyond themes, times and places because of its recognizable title and lyrics, further adding to the layers of association of the images it accompanies.

The strongly referential element of rock and pop music, frequently provided by such nonmusical signifiers as lyrics and song titles, enhanced that familiarity by forcefully linking tunes to their specific cultural and historical context. It was in this element that gave popular music its associational potency, a power that more than compensated for its formal limitations. (Smith, 1998, p. 163)

While already well-known songs are perhaps limited because of their format and their provocation of memories, their potential for multi-associations and juxtapositions overcome any initial structural difficulties. Songs can be successfully used in a manner for which they were not intended such as in *A Clockwork Orange* (1971) when *Singin' in the Rain* is heard while a woman is being sexually assaulted. The effect is horrifying. And so we have seen that compilation soundtracks of previously-released songs have the ability to go above and beyond the functions of movie music. This is not to say that they are inherently superior, but that the compilation soundtrack's potential to open up and generate new and layered meanings for songs as well as for filmic discourse is limitless.

### *Implications*

From the first moment the motion picture was born, music has been its close companion. The illustrated song was the earliest form of popular film song, complete with sing-along lyric slides. Since its introduction into film, music has accumulated a canon, and historical signposts, where one can isolate its function, its authors, and its areas of growth. The dependence of production houses upon musicians, composers, supervisors, directors and eventually record companies, is one that has incurred a give-

and-take relationship between both cultural industries. The film soundtrack, as a successful and widely proliferated cultural product, exposes the inextricable bond between music and film and the marketing of both as one commodity in the soundtrack. The history of the film soundtrack, both “classical” and compilation, has long roots and can always be traced back to the silent picture, to movie music, to the crooners of the musicals, and to the rock and roll showcase.

## **Chapter 2: Subcultures, Audiences and Nostalgia**

Music and film are typically viewed as commodities, produced within and by the mechanisms of so-called “mass culture.” The status of music as a commodity form has been examined in several fields of study, including musicology, cultural studies, communications theory and popular musical studies. In this chapter, I will examine the ways in which music and film negotiate their industrial dimensions, with an emphasis on their role within industrial processes, their commodification and their meaning to consumers. I will do so through a consideration of issues such as creativity, authenticity and nostalgia – issues which continue to surround popular music.

While the place of popular music within film has become standardized and predictable, one may still find examples in which music is bound to film in ingenious and creative ways. Innovation occasionally employs a nostalgic look back at the music of older generations. This look back essentially involves the perception that older music is free of capitalist pressures, more authentic, and reflective of true emotions and times of real struggle. We will look at the ways in which certain films use music to elicit different ways of relating to music and its history, ways of consuming music that are subcultural or evocative of new kinds of community. I will illustrate this through an analysis of how group formation, rock audiences, and the importance of archival knowledge of music intersect and relate to music consumption. In particular, I will examine films whose use of popular music may be considered “archival,” that is, dependent on carefully chosen musical texts from the past whose appeal is primarily nostalgic. Chapters 3 and 4 offer the analysis of two specific soundtracks in which an “archival” sensibility may be found.



It is necessary at this point, however, to consider the question of music and its commodification in a more general sense.

### *Exchange Value, Regressive Listening and Standardization*

Critics, audiences and various forms of media discuss music in ways that encourage listeners to establish a preference and taste. A recurrent feature of the critique of mass culture has been the claim that musical taste and connoisseurship, of the sort once associated with classical or other “high” forms of music, have declined with the ascendancy of popular music and of the popular culture which surrounds and supports it. This claim usually accompanies the argument that music itself has undergone a decline or degeneration in an age of popular culture.

Cultural studies theorists like Theodor Adorno (1991) condemn music with charges of superficiality and meaninglessness. While many cultural and popular music theorists have critiqued and moved beyond Adorno’s assertions, it is important to begin with Adorno’s ideas because they have such a historical weight in critical thinking about popular music. Adorno claims that in various music genres, particularly in commercial pop, performances and instruments are subordinate to the notion of having a marketable voice and a readable or relatable image (Adorno, 1991). Voice and/or image become the fetishized content of the music; it is these that are consumed. This argument posits that, generally, a successful star is blessed with an extremely high or loud voice. Emphasis on the voice requires not only that a specific kind of voice be appreciated and worthy, but also creates a framework wherein all voices (read: stars) are similar to one another and lacking in uniqueness. The narrowness of what is read as talent and success leads to

uniformity, and is part of the collapse of contemporary musical life into commodity form. Pop stars like Britney Spears or Christine Aguilera might be taken as evidence of the phenomena Adorno describes. In both cases, we find standardized “molds” which come to define particular musical genres. Despite their apparent unoriginality, these performer-figures seem to find audiences and elicit pleasure in their fans (Adorno, 1991).

Adorno (1991) argues that, “music, with all the attributes of the ethereal and sublime which are generously accorded it, serves in America today as an advertisement for commodities which one must acquire in order to be able to hear music” (p. 38). Songs are released and advertised as album hits on the radio, on television programs and in record store windows. This suggests that much of the associated value is in the purchasing of the hit song, rather than in the enjoyment of the music. Adorno states that the success of a band and the musical knowledge of a fan are not connected to listening to or liking the record or song, but to its purchasing. This means that the appearance and status offered by the commodity give it its exchange value and make the buying and owning the important features of the music (Adorno, 1991). Adorno points to passive or “regressive” listening as another detrimental feature of popular music and its audience. The standardization of music focuses upon moments of recognition and forgetting, so that hit lines or well-recognized riffs are easily brought to mind. Regressive listening encourages the listener to focus on a specific line or riff, and dulls or camouflages a song’s similarity to other songs. The radio is another means for advertising what is popular and current and this is accomplished through repetition. Music is worn out and overplayed; both the listener and the hit songs are exhausted through repetition. Yet despite this repetition and propagation, the transformation of the hit song into a readable

and recognizable sign of currency and “hipness” still occurs and thrives. Music that becomes worn out will eventually become a sign of the times and take on the function of nostalgia and “retro.” Its repetition and dominance almost guarantee that it will return as a valuable relic. The record industry capitalizes on this certainty and readily maintains the status quo (Adorno, 1991).

To summarize Adorno’s contribution to this study about music and film soundtracks, it is his argument concerning the development of taste discernment that strikes me as the most pertinent. Furthermore his disdain for the abuses, pitfalls and banality of popular music (and as will be seen - film soundtracks), encourages me to seek out music and films that are unique, fresh and innovative. In the section that follows, I will both draw from and contest his perspectives.

I am in agreement with Adorno when it comes to Top 40 radio and the standardization of particular songs and voices. However, despite Adorno's argument that all musical preferences have been replaced by the pre-selection of songs incessantly repeated on popular radio shows, I think there is still a place for personal taste and preference. This is evident in the existence of an audience that actively seeks out less prevalent styles of music. I am also unconvinced that knowledge and recognition of symbols of taste and art occlude their true appreciation. The ability to read symbols, or rather trademarks and labels, musicians and venues, is intrinsic to the exchange value of music and other art, and to positioning oneself accordingly.

### *Knowledge is Power?*

The recognition and digestion of contemporary cultural products are facilitated by their associative qualities. New songs and artists are tolerated and eventually appreciated because of their similarity to previous music and musicians. Musical adaptations from earlier works do not seek to veil similarities or derivations, but rather hold onto comparisons as means for justification. The song or album as an information link to the past also allows the consumer to become an expert and to acquire knowledge that can be used as social exchange value and as a social marker. Because our understanding of the world around us may be rooted in our experience of popular culture, we navigate through popular culture by seeking out signposts and points of reference within it. The range of information available creates varied possibilities for relating and reflecting similar likes and dislikes between individuals, and in turn helps to establish a collectivity. The formation of peer groups allows individuals to feel secure and to find solidarity in being uniformly informed.

Being informed is not equivalent to being critical. In fact, being informed is most often a means of social cache, of being in tune with the scene and having a pre-digested and pre-approved opinion. Moreover, there is a distinct scorn for incorrect information and for lack of information from those “in the know.” That being said, it is not the actual information that is given value, but the having of that information, of being aware and being up to date. The information is often diluted into quick facts, which can be drawn upon by any “hipster.” The opinions and ideas shared are not always subjective or personal, or entirely true, but they are useful in that they are instantly understandable and relatable.

Cultural products such as music and film lend themselves to quick assignation and legibility by the consumer. For example, these days, the hipster translates good and bad music into instantly identifiable categories, such as those of “indie” and “Top 40”, respectively. The same can be said of movies, where the independent production is worthy and artistic, while the blockbuster is base and redundant. In this way, “distinctions are never just assertions of equal difference; they usually entail some claim to authority and presume the inferiority of *others*” (Thornton, 1997, p. 201). These judgements of what is good and bad allow people to form cultural groupings based on their shared tastes and perceptions of culture.

The types of group alignment just described lead us to suggest that the term “mass culture” may have lost much of its validity. Rather, there exist various formations and subdivisions, and within those, even smaller and more refined collectivities. There is a prescribed way of being within these small groupings that is often referred to as subculture. However, despite differences across subcultures in terms of taste, dress, language and general behaviour, there is still a following; a group that is solidified in its common knowledge and acquiescence to a mode of being. This group dispersal is identifiable as much in high schools as it is on city streets, venues and scenes that are the hot spots for subcultural activity. The having of the appropriate information, knowledge and accuracy acts as a passport into a variety of scenes and loci. The information creates a semblance of authenticity and of belonging to something that is secret and shared by a select few. “The social logic of subcultural capital reveals itself most clearly by what it dislikes and by what it emphatically isn’t” (Thornton, 1997, p. 208). In order to discuss nostalgic cultural preferences, it is necessary to examine more closely the functions and

ideals of subculture, the role that music has taken on, and how subculture is an attempt to move away from mass culture while implementing the same manipulations and requirements.

The refusal to conform can often lead to conformity of a smaller scale, as a break with convention produces new conventions. Once the signs of the subculture are legible, signs such as the style, the vocabulary and the values or taste, they are usually visible in mainstream media. Television, film, newspapers and magazines are able to articulate and cater to the values of this new visible group. The marketing and commodification of various subcultures contribute to the tensions between mass and sub culture and the desire of a subculture to separate itself more still (Hebdige, 1997). The importance and value of information or knowledge is crucial to those collectives that adamantly deny the far reaches of mass culture. That being said, knowledge and information do not eliminate pleasure and the authentic enjoyment of music.

### *Rock Music and Consumer Culture*

“Rock’s vitality ... involves both escape and solidarity. With it, young people struggle over the meaning of pleasure” (Hesmondhalgh, 2001, p. 279). This statement is indicative of the potential of subculture, as genres of music, especially rock, lend themselves to a youth culture that seeks to identify itself as individual or separate from the mainstream. Historically, leisure has been associated with oppositional positioning as individuals resisting the demands of work and industrialism turned to leisure, pleasure and music. Music as pleasure has been and often is a part of establishing one’s position against mass culture. Taking up a position is not fundamentally an informed political

act, but rather, as stated before, a means of identification and individuality in the face of mass society. This resistance to anonymity is grounded in consumerist ideals where music, film, style and scene are what matter (Stratton, 1997).

“The persistent belief that rock somehow emerges outside the mainstream, prior to the involvement of the record industry, mass media, or large audiences expresses a widespread feeling that, despite its success, rock remains magically untainted by ‘the masses’” (Keightley, 2001, p. 127). As performers, musicians remain tied to their audiences and the shared experience of the music, while as recording artists, consumerism and mass production come into play. However, I touch on these major points only to explain that the relationship of music to audiences, in terms of counterculture, authenticity and individuality, is not static. A band or musician who was, at one moment, seen as creative and breaking through boundaries, may be labeled as a follower in the next, and can years later return to his original honorable standing.

Rock music from the ‘60s and ‘70s is idealized for its perceived tendency to share true emotion and strong feelings via the music. “Rock’s creativity, in describing an individual sensibility, is contrasted to the soulless formulas of pop” (Frith, 1983, p. 161). Certain audiences and listeners today perceive a marked difference between old and new music and find that a passion for making music and expressing real emotion is evidenced in older music, and in rock specifically (Keightley, 2001). Increasingly, older forms of rock music are seen as authentic or artful, while those of the present are deemed overly produced, contrived or commercial. The transparent manufacture of music is exposed through MTV, Top 40 radio, and a long list of reality television programming. While musicians have always struggled with imitation and standardization, there is the increased

perception that musical alienation is less likely to be found in a look back at music of the past.

Music's capacity for leisure and entertainment encourages musicians and composers to dip into successful productions and recordings and use them as a creative foundation, for what was successful in the past can surely work again. In the reworking of the old, as well as its resurrection, archival music has become a representation of an artistically better time and is married to a nostalgia that glorifies and exemplifies it as honest and pure. The supposed purity and innocence of older music is also inspired by its respite from commercial ties and market saturation. Because the music of the '60s and '70s is not being advertised and distributed in the same way as contemporary music, it seems to be less entrenched in consumerism and mainstream valuation. Appreciators of this music have a sense of knowing something that is secret and scarce, as even the generations that first appreciated the music seem to have let go of the past. And so new generations are making their own discoveries of albums and songs that appear to be more personal and sacred because they have to be discovered, and because of what the music has to say. At this point, a brief review of the rise of rock music and its surrounding audiences will clarify why rock from the 1960s and '70s is often returned to and romanticized.

### *The Romanticization of Rock*

Older rock, folk, and punk music have come to be embraced for their political and social meanings and responses. The development of songs in response to historical conditions attaches the music to a particular time in history and romanticizes its original



context. Rock music's historical core is the desire to escape the alienation of the workplace and to participate in pleasure and leisure. The children of the middle classes of the 1940s and '50s sought to break away from their parents' values and to find cultural alternatives, consuming music as a marker of their rebellion. This emergence of a generation gap both fuelled and drew on the associations between youth and the musical forms of rock and roll or rock (Lipsitz, 1990).

The autonomy, authenticity and emotion which children of the middle class were seeking were to be found, or so it was imagined, within the lives of the working class. The process of "prestige from below" infused the middle class fascination with the working class' rock and roll. In the very same way as the middle class turned to a 'lower' cultural group's music, the working class had turned to black music. In the mid-1950s, "Chuck Berry found himself popular with middle class, white audiences even though he had lived his whole life within a segregated ghetto and even though his music drew mainly upon the blues" (Lipsitz, 1990, p.122). Issues of appropriation and "prestige from below" are hot topics in the fields of musicology and cultural studies, but will only be used in this analysis to illuminate the romanticization of rock.

Rock was in a highly developmental and transitional stage in the early 1960s. A critical void was created by the simultaneous deaths of Ritchie Vallens, The Big Bopper, and Buddy Holly as well as the drafting of Elvis Presley. "The music and culture of the in-between years were incredibly important, and may be viewed as a laboratory of sorts in which different elements of what would later become rock culture took shape" (Keightley, 2001, p. 116). Surf bands, folk music, soul, and funk all contributed to new and emerging musical styles out of which rock has grown. The Beatles and other British

Invasion bands helped to create and encourage a discourse on social rebellion for young people.

The 1960s, with the Vietnam War and more general calls for radicalism and unity, transformed campus culture and mobilized young people for political purposes. In 1968, events in Paris, Czechoslovakia and in the rest of Europe and America spawned the possibilities of liberation and spurred a broader anti-conformism. Rock was the sound of this period of time. Along with socially conscious folk music, rock addressed the conflicts between public and private responsibilities and between freedom and obligation (Frith, 1983). These conflicts also reflected the transitional time between adolescence and adulthood and attempted to articulate resistance against what was expected. “The massive youth demographic of the 1960s allowed rock to be born within the mainstream of popular music and, at the same time, to organize itself around an oppositional stance toward mass culture” (Keightley, 2001, p. 126).

It is very difficult to define rock in specific or isolated terms. ‘Rock’ is even differentiated from ‘rock and roll’ and within ‘rock’ there are multitudes of subdivisions. The British Invasion is one movement in rock that marks a turning point in the larger rock culture. The British Invasion is representative of a shift in taste and in consumer trends in the United States. Musicians were highly influenced by what other musicians were creating at this time; folk, blues, and British styles all played off one another. “Rock was born within the popular mainstream as an exclusively youth-oriented music” (Keightley, 2001, p. 122).

*"What Music Means to Me:" Rock and Youth Culture*

Youth culture, as we have seen, is often discussed in relation to leisure and in relation to particular styles of consumption. One of the appeals of rock and of other music that is consumed by youth markets is that its performers were (and often are) the same age as their audience and tend to have similar interests and experiences. Simon Frith's (1983) study of the youth culture's uses of music in his book *A Sociology of Rock*, indicated that music is evaluated in terms of its message. It is praised for its originality and truthfulness and condemned for its repetition and banality. Frith found that peer groups are constructed around shared musical taste. Within these groups, musical taste is the symbol of individuality. Music is an essential element to the lives of the youth in this study, who state that they are always listening to records. The subjects are articulate and extremely self-aware and identify these same qualities in the music they like. Music is used to distinguish the young from the old and to organize and form communities. Musical taste serves the same function as a badge and as a means of identifying and representing emotion and social positions. This is the makings of subculture (Frith, 1983).

Identification with a particular subculture or community often involves the romanticization of struggle and rebellion, as do the depictions and reenactments of the 1960s and 1970s. Leisure is associated with music, as leisure is generally the time when commodities are purchased and consumed. The pleasure of rock reflects the concepts of leisure embedded in entertainment, relaxation and fun. These are all ideals that have emerged from cultural struggle. In the '60s and '70s, youths tended to spend their

income almost entirely on leisure. Class differences in how youth use music should be considered because:

They reveal that if working-class street culture is a romantic idea for 'rebel' suburban kids – a fantasy of spontaneous style and pleasure and excitement – so is student culture a romantic idea for 'rebel' street kids – a fantasy of self-exploration, sexual freedom, art and angst. These are fantasies about leisure, about different ways of life, different *possibilities*, and rock is a powerful mass medium because it puts the different fantasies together. (Frith, 1983, p. 261)

The music press is still one more element involved in the shaping of music ideology and ascribing meaning to music genres or movements. As mentioned, in the 1960s, rock music was the basic form of underground culture and was heavily inscribed with ideologies of political positioning, aggression, sexuality and cultural struggle. Rock was talked about as the articulation of a new youth community and as an opposition to the traditional values of mass culture. In providing images of and information about musicians, music magazines confirm taste and offer “a sense of hip community” (Frith, 1983, p. 175). The opinions, likes and dislikes of the musicians matter and are given attention, as the music press helps to articulate and form the tastes of music communities and subcultures. “Rock ideologues rest their case ... on assertions about the place of their music in youth cultures, in experiences of sex and class and growing up,” (Frith, 1983, p. 177).

Concerns for style, fashion, as well as music are also a part of subculture. “Style represents the experience of class oppression in the individual; the moment of refusal is the act of symbolic creation itself” (Frith, 1983, p. 219). Consumption of other media forms, such as film and television, also reflects subcultural values. Perhaps in this we can begin to see an overlap between film, music, and their audiences. This overlap is

evident when we consider the film soundtrack, in which tastes for music and for cinema are intertwined.

The 1960s and '70s are still painted as a time of excitement, rebellion, social and political struggle, and change. Of course, rock has continued its momentum after the 1970s, generating new artists, styles, sounds, and compositions over the last three decades. However, the discussion of music rests here in order to delineate a specific rock audience laden with ideals of nostalgia. The film soundtracks analyzed in the following chapters utilize the music of this time period.

### *Music and Memory*

Electronic mass media allows us to connect and relate to people and historical events we have never experienced first-hand. The sharing of unlived experiences across the globe began with the telegraph of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, one of the first forms of electronic mass media to perpetuate the distribution of isolated and uniform facts across barriers of space and time. A person can acquire memories of a past to which s/he never belonged, simply because electronic imagery keeps the feeling of a time alive for future generations. In this way, history and commercialized leisure come together because media representations of the past, whether in film, music or literature, review historical events in a way that is repetitive and reflective of a homogenous experience (Lipsitz, 1990).

Collective memory has been, and still is, formed by cultural products and recurring themes and pictures. In this sense 'collective memory' refers to the ways in which historical events are recounted, depicted, and discussed. This reproduction of the

past is a part of popular culture and shared history. "Popular culture has no fixed forms: the historical circumstances of reception and appropriation determine whether novels or motion pictures or videos belong to a sphere called popular culture" (Lipsitz, 1990, p. 13). Consumers are able to move between subject positions and to experience stories and lives that may not be authentic or accurate. While residual memory, that is, memories of those who grew up in the time being represented, may prescribe the narrative, it is the interplay between all of these dialogues telling a similar story, that creates illusory memories and nostalgia (Lipsitz, 1990).

The participation of consumers in various media forms allows them to generate memories of a time they did not experience and are unrelated to. Thus the relationship of history and popular culture is intricate and complex, incurring nostalgia and the desire for times long since past. Mass media's manipulation and ascribing of collective memory may serve the economy and encourage consumerism. At the same time, the renewal of the past denotes a belief, whether true or not, of better times, and the desire for better times in the future. Music is often reflected upon in this way, especially the rock music of the '60s and '70s.

### *The Function of Nostalgia*

Nostalgia is defined by Fred Davis (1979), as a form of consciousness characterized by:

A heightened focus on things past along with an enhanced credence in them, accompanied by considerable musing, mild detachment from the affairs of every day life, an essentially appreciative stance toward the self and attenuation of that sense of we-ness which in everyday life frames and constrains our conduct. (p. 81)

I believe these characterizations more than adequately attend to the experience of nostalgia and even more so when considered in relation to music and film. Davis goes so far as to say that nostalgia is often a purposeful aesthetic quality in art. He supports this by reminding us how often we, ourselves, are reminded of and made to feel longing for other times and places. Composers and artists intuit what melodies and textures will evoke such feelings in their audiences, just as music supervisors understand what songs will elicit feelings of nostalgia. These collectively experienced feelings of nostalgia cultivate a sense of history and images of distinct times and places (Davis, 1979).

I would like to position nostalgia in a context of feeling beyond what has been personally experienced. It is clear that nostalgia shapes and molds history, and that it does so in a way that creates common feelings about the past. As already stated, the shaping and reading of history are done collectively, through text, photographs, films, etc. However, I am interested in the appreciation and valuation of the past that is effected on a more individual basis. Not everyone seeks pleasure and satisfaction in old music and in old films. Today, many younger generations are able to offer a suitable description of the sixties, seventies, and even of the twenties. But how many would say that these were better times?

### *The Effects of Nostalgia on Music*

Popular music is always engaged in a dialogue with the past because it revives and reinvents previous works. 'Popular music' here implies a large audience appeal, rather than a genre of music. To recognize that popular music involves a continuous conversation with what came before is to address the notion of a collective music

memory. There is an ongoing revival within popular music, which does not result in replicas, but more of a referential quality. The signs are readable; the familiar chord progressions, rhythms, and instrumentation of contemporary music can also be located in older music. In addition to music's connection to previous works, the tendency for music to become highly associative with events, both global and personal, encourages listeners to call upon an internal dialogue of senses and memories. As new music negotiates with the music of the past, music, memory, and history are conflated. This regularly results in the ensuing judgement of old music as better and more meaningful because of the experiences with which it is associated.

Rock and roll carries with it an awareness of its own history. Tributes are routinely paid and references are regularly made to the icons of the past. As the middle class turned to the working class for notions of authenticity and emotion, so do modern day listeners return to the past to explore ideals of hope and authenticity, which have been formed through collective memory and nostalgia. Cultural emblems not only recall time periods, but also tend to become absorbed in contemporary memory and feelings that cloud reality and confuse commodities and culture with reality. The photographs, music and clothing of the '60s and '70s represent those decades as ones of idealism and a general "good time", while the music and fashion of the eighties explicate the decade as one of excess and stylization. As such, it is significantly more gratifying to look to the past as a source for originality and beginnings, rather than to rely on what is contemporary, especially in relation to music.



Memories of oppression and the struggle for freedom, whether by the working class, African Americans or women, are visible in rock and roll and call upon feelings of frustration and hope that are the essence of the music itself.

Musical forms have meaning only as they can be interpreted by knowing subjects. An inventory of the basic vocabulary of rock and roll reveals something about the triumphs of class hierarchies, of racism, sexism, materialism, and individualism, but it also identifies an unfinished dialogue about the potential of oppositional traditions. (Lipsitz 1990, p. 109)

There is an undeniable engagement of romance with the post WWII era of resistance and activism. The threat of rock and roll to middle class morality layered it with emotion, hope, and above all, meaning. The desire for meaning and authenticity clouds history and informs collective memory, endowing the past with moments that perhaps never truly existed. The revival of urban, working class sound is evidence of the romanticism that permeates rock music and rock music audiences (Lipsitz, 1990). This revival can be catalogued from the British invasion of The Beatles, who drew from African American rhythm & blues, to the invasion of The Strokes and The White Stripes in 2000, and the renewal of the garage sound that invokes images of urbanity and the working class.

As music and film have become inextricably joined through the emergence of the soundtrack, film music struggles to maintain originality and innovation, as it has become subject to abuse and misuse.

#### *The Soundtrack: Film Music and its Bad Habits*

Film, like music, is a product of the cultural industry. Film is not an isolated medium, but rather combines many media such as art, writing, acting, and music. And

much like music, film has become a reflexive and reflective medium wherein other great works are imitated and cited explicitly so that a canon or history is created in the film itself. Film, as a form of leisure and pleasure, has become a source of entertainment and thus also largely standardized.

Of all the media of cultural industry, the motion picture, as the most comprehensive, most clearly displays this tendency to amalgamation. The development and integration of its technical elements – pictures, words, sound, script, acting, and photography, have paralleled certain social tendencies to amalgamation of traditional cultural values that have become commodities. (Adorno & Eisler, 2003, p. 26)

The music of films first held a practical character, and eventually came to follow certain rules and preconceived notions of what movie music should be. There is a dependence on leitmotifs as particular scenes or emotions call upon routine melodies and instruments for certain moments. The leitmotif calls for instant recognition of a cinematic event or moment. It is broken up into brief stints, interrupted by dialogue and action, and then referred to again when necessary as it becomes movie music, so easily recognizable and understood (Adorno & Eisler, 2003).

Moreover, the rules of movie music require that it is always melodic, harmonious, and follows a routine schematic. However, requirements of symmetry and poetic quality within the music are often unable to attend to the dynamics and nuances of a cinematic moment, thus stifling the possibility of varied readings. In order to produce a more interesting and original dynamic within film, movie music needs to expand and break away from this kind of standardization. That being said, innovations and new movie techniques are few and far between.

According to the rules, movie music must not only be melodic and symmetrical; it must always be unobtrusive to the onscreen dialogue and action as well as to the viewer

(Adorno & Eisler, 2003). This generalization indicates that music should always be secondary in film. Despite this rule of discreteness, recurrent swells of dramatic music do not lend themselves to invisibility, but instead overwhelm the theatre and the audience. More often than not, the use of music in film gives in to the regular pitfalls of its conventions and die-hard habits.

The belief that music must accompany and correspond to the visual is another element of the 'rules'. Music must relate to the on screen action either through imitation or through recognizable themes like the action music featured in several Ridley Scott and Jerry Bruckheimer productions (*G.I. Jane*, *Black Hawk Down*, *Con Air*). One recurrent layering of music to the visual occurs when images of nature and open landscapes are moving across the screen, such as the pastoral scenes of *A River Runs Through it*. A theme invoking one's peaceful appreciation of nature would appear here and has been overworked and overplayed, continuing to appear at such stereotypical times (Adorno & Eisler, 2003). The orchestral romantic adages that pop up in the romantic comedy are forever relied upon and inserted at the most obvious and expected times, and the hero's theme of grandeur and success are waited upon in the film's final moments of excitement and denouement. It is at such times that one can clearly pinpoint the repetition and imitation of movie music, and even more so when a film supplies well-known popular songs that find themselves in a dozen or so films.

Just as commercial television in America has learned to structure its narrative around frequent commercial breaks, providing mini-enigmas to be resolved, so the scenes in numerous Hollywood, and more recently, British movies emulate the structure of the pop record. (Lapedis, 1999, p. 368)

One of the most frustrating practices in movie music is when a film relies upon a song or composition that has been relied upon time and time again. Some examples include pieces of classical music such as *Moonlight Sonata* and Mendelssohn's wedding march, and popular songs like Aretha Franklin's *Respect* or The Rolling Stone's *Satisfaction*. The regular use of known and recognized music does not elicit a new response from audiences as it is quickly understood and associated with the obvious and repeated emotions of the scenes it accompanies. Rare moments like *A Clockwork Orange*'s ironic use of *Singin' In the Rain* mentioned in Chapter 1, as well *Donnie Darko*'s portentous use of *Head Over Heels*, expand the possibilities of utilizing previously-released songs, but these are indeed rarities.

The soundtrack as a compelling addendum to action or dialogue in film has lost its power because of its replication and exhaustion, and therefore abuse and misuse. Composers and musicians created particular musical effects and devices decades ago and, arguably, these have been drawn upon and repeated far too often. Part of this standardization of movie music is directly related to the standardization of film itself. This includes its subject matter, direction, acting, style and execution. In some films, music has become as important as the visual, evidence of the demand for "an approach which foregrounds the importance of the musical soundtrack" (Lapedis, 1999, p. 368). It is therefore of interest to examine films that break away from such standardization and to question and investigate these films' use of music. The films that will be analyzed correspond to issues of taste, archival knowledge, audience and most importantly, nostalgia.

### Chapter 3: *High Fidelity*: A Prescription for Taste and Required Knowledge

The film *High Fidelity* offers insight both into the ways in which communities are unified through shared knowledge and passions and into the ways in which a soundtrack can wholly envelop a film. *High Fidelity*'s characters, dialogue, and narration are highly self-aware and obsessed with the ostensible coolness of archival knowledge. Most of the film's action and conversation is centered on music. Given the relevance of music to the story, the soundtrack must reflect the film's preoccupation with music. The soundtrack does so by dipping into a rich musical heritage, while at the same time maintaining a sense of cultural currency. The same can be said of *High Fidelity*'s characters, as it becomes plain that to truly appreciate music, one must understand its history, lineage, and appropriations. Simply put, *High Fidelity* talks about the way music should be appreciated and then sets this appreciation into motion with its soundtrack.

#### *Soul, Pop and Rock & Roll Soundtracks Before the '90s*

Although the history of the relationship between film and music was reviewed in Chapter 1, an abridged examination of the soundtrack over the last three decades will help to better position the current direction of the film soundtrack. In an article found in *Film Score Monthly*, Lukas Kendall (1998) revisits the soundtracks of the 1960s and '70s and discusses the lack of appreciation for some of the film music of this time. Innovations occurring in rock, rhythm and blues, and contemporary classical music encouraged composers to push the boundaries and explore opportunities for fusion and new pop scoring techniques. These styles of hybrid compilation scores are epitomized by

the music of *Shaft*, and by its recurrent imitations that were found in a variety of television police dramas. *Enter the Dragon* and *Superfly* are two other films where the soundtracks embody the “fusion of rhythm and blues elements into an action score”

(Kendall, 1998, p. 32). Theorist Jeff Smith (1998) says of these soundtracks that:

Though none of these films adheres to the neo-Romantic, symphonic principles of the classical Hollywood score, their composers and music supervisors nonetheless used their respective idioms – jazz, folk, and funk – to create music that was written directly to accommodate the moods, actions, and editing of the film’s image tracks. (p. 163)

Rolling Stone journalist Rob Tannenbaum (1985) describes how, despite a few collaborative projects, in the mid-to-late 1970s, rock musicians were weary and reluctant to collaborate on film soundtracks. While some soundtracks of the ‘60s and ‘70s had accrued success such as *Saturday Night Fever* and *The Sound of Music*, the sales of soundtrack albums during this period were unpredictable. However, in what is termed “the Soundtrack Summer of 1985,” four singles on the top ten list came from film soundtracks by artists such as Cyndi Lauper, Duran Duran and Huey Lewis and the News. By then, many bands and artists were interested in receiving the exposure and circulation offered by the movie soundtrack, and bands like Simple Minds and The Specials achieved chart success. Very quickly, and almost to the point of over-kill, the soundtracks of mid-1980s films came to consist of compilations of songs that appeared, more and more, to be have been thrown together haphazardly. In response to this heedless use of songs, music supervisors were hired to generate soundtracks that shared the tone and emotion of the films (Tannenbaum, 1985).

Writer and director John Hughes recognized the potential of the pop song soundtrack. Hughes offers *Animal House* and *American Graffiti* as examples of “what

you can do to heighten the visual effect of the scene and the intellectual effect of the dialogue with the emotional effect of music” (Tannenbaum, 1985, p. 33). Hughes wrote his screenplays while listening to particular albums, taking the soundtrack music into careful consideration and said that each of his films was written to the style of a few bands. For example, *Pretty in Pink* was “written to” the Psychedelic Furs, Lou Reed and Mott the Hoople, while *The Breakfast Club* was “written to” the Clash and Elvis Costello. Already in the 1980s, it was becoming important for pop song and film to depend on one another and retain their mutual associations. This trend continued throughout the 1990s as pop song soundtracks were pumped out in what has, for the most part, been criticized as a manufactured and generic method.

In 1999, discussions at a conference attended by film producers, music supervisors, composers, and directors yielded the general consensus that films had become extremely music-driven in Hollywood. Commercial considerations had been prioritized over quality soundtracks and music more fitting to the films. This generally diminished the quality of the soundtrack. Examples were cited such as *Armageddon*, “where the music is created ‘by committee.’ The result: all climax, no foreplay” (Miller, 1999, p. 43). Furthermore, many films submit to the marketplace and become entrenched in a particular genre of music that is popular at a particular given moment. Films of the early ‘90s such as *Deep Cover*, *Above the Rim*, and *Boyz N the Hood* all feature rap as the choice music genre of urban crime dramas. While new and changing pop styles may have entered the soundtrack scene, they did not necessarily alter the basic patterns of thematic organization (Smith, 1998). Discussions also concluded that good film music

should not be an exact reiteration of the onscreen action, but should “create a parallel universe to the film, telling a story of its own,” (Miller, 1999, p. 43).

### *The New Soundtrack*

In 2002, Dylan Callaghan, a writer for Billboard Magazine, claimed that in response to generic radio and “quick score compilation albums,” today’s soundtrack business has become edgier and acquired a more contemporary aesthetic. In comparison to the 1990s, some of today’s more interesting soundtracks are artistically deeper and more relevant to their films. Rather than relying on pop has-beens like Bryan Adams and Phil Collins, current and upcoming artists are being called upon to add their names to the soundtrack roster (Callaghan, 2002). Tamara Conniff and Carla Hay of Billboard also agree that after the boom in soundtrack sales in the late 1990s, soundtracks have turned towards songs that are more meaningful to the film rather than relying upon songs from big name artists. A revaluation of the soundtrack has deemed an authentic compilation more successful than songs that are “inspired-by,” (Conniff & Hay, 2002). The soundtracks that sell are the soundtracks where the music is vital to the film’s identity. For example, *O Brother Where Art Thou* (2000) takes place in the 1930s in the Deep South and is set to the music of the South, both bluegrass and early blues. The music is part of the movie’s storytelling.

Music supervisor Maureen Crowe says “soundtracks must be edgy, hip and very much a part of contemporary youth culture” (Callaghan, 2002, p. 1). Not only must soundtracks represent what is current, but also what is about to be “hot”. Mark Mothersbaugh, Devo leader turned music supervisor, explains “artists are more interested



than they used to be in soundtracks, partly because pop music is just an unpleasant arena right now. Film music is more enjoyable and creative; you get a lot more freedom” (Callaghan, 2002, p.2). Callaghan claims that there has been yet another soundtrack explosion since the ‘90s, both in film and in television. Indeed, a soundtrack is produced and marketed for nearly every film and for many television series. Series like Fox’s *The O.C.* and the W.B.’s *One Tree Hill* promote themselves as authorities on what is up-and-coming in the music world, telling audiences which artists were featured during the show at the end of each episode and on their websites. However, what is up-and-coming can also be an “oldie but a goodie” that has long since been forgotten and is ready for revival. In 2000, Nick Drake’s *Pink Moon* appeared in a Volkswagen commercial at the same time as Elton John’s *Tiny Dancer* appeared in Cameron Crowe’s *Almost Famous*. Both songs found new, younger audiences and regenerated commercial success. Moreover, because a soundtrack is usually released before its film, the film’s targeted demographic is identified and attracted to the film by its soundtrack, as well as its advertising, trailers, and posters (Callaghan, 2002).

### *Pop Songs and the Visual*

As I have discussed in previous chapters, music is no longer secondary in film, and does not necessarily have to reflect the literal emotions or action of on-screen events. The result is “an approach which foregrounds the importance of the musical soundtrack: one that positions it as parallel to the visual and as having a discrete and intrinsic meaning in addition to its function within or beyond the diegesis” (Lapedis, 1999, p. 368). More often than not, pop songs in film rely on the song’s emotional conventions,

and therefore ground the film in a wider pop culture context. This wider context involves the capacity of the music to call upon other points of reference beyond what is happening in the film and allows for complexity, layer and depth.

The strongly referential element of rock and pop music, frequently provided by such nonmusical signifiers as lyrics and song titles, enhanced that familiarity by forcefully linking tunes to their specific historical context. It was this latter element that gave popular music its associational potency, a power that more than compensated for its formal limitations. (Smith, 1998, p. 163)

Previously released pop music that has had a cultural context and audience prior to a soundtrack, carries with it a sense of history and meaning external to a film and to the visual. The songs are therefore able to stand as separate entities in their own right. Furthermore, in comparison to films that rely upon classical music and film score, pop songs are given high prominence in their featured scenes. Songs with strong lyrics or strong referential qualities can create the potential for complex meaning, irony and juxtapositioning (Lapedis, 1999). Pop songs in film can also encourage audiences “to identify not with the film characters themselves but with their emotions; and these emotions are ‘signaled pre-eminently by music which can offer us emotional experience *directly*’ (Frith, 1989, p. 136).

*High Fidelity* uses pop music for its immediate and predictable emotional affect and for its prescribed reading of the event. However, despite the film’s somewhat commonplace use of music, it is the songs themselves which are of particular intrigue because of their anachronistic qualities, as well as the way in which the characters, themselves, discuss music and its importance to a full cultural life.

### *High Fidelity: Music as Life*

*High Fidelity* (2000) is directed by Stephen Frears and adapted from British writer Nick Hornby's best-selling novel of same name. Screenplay writers changed the setting of the story from London to Chicago (Khoury, 2001). The lead character of Rob Gordon, played by John Cusack, is described as a "stereotypical perpetual-adolescent male, stuck in that moment of teenage narcissism where pop songs are not evanescent trivia but contain the secrets of the meaning of life," (McCabe, 2000, p. 18). The film is full of both cynicism and sentiment and this is evidenced by the dialogue and by the songs that appear in the film.

The film is narrated by John Cusack's character in the form of direct address, offering a great deal of insight into the beliefs and ideals of the character of Rob Gordon and his two record store clerk sidekicks, Barry (Jack Black) and Dick (Todd Luiso). The fact that Rob owns a record store gives us even more insight into his character. The record store provides the most ideal setting for his prescriptions for taste of music, books, television and film, and anything else everyone needs to know about these areas of pop culture.

Rob's joy in being master of his own little vinyl principality is lovingly conveyed; he's the unchallenged taste-meister, mapping out the parameters of acceptable and unacceptable music, gently shepherding customers towards records they did not come in to by, but he knows will enrich their lives. (Medhurst, 2000, p. 36)

The musical reference points are altered from those found in Hornby's novel to reflect the U.S. setting, broadening and updating the name-dropping to include bands such as Stereolab and the Beta Band.

*High Fidelity* is set up as a guy's movie, from the characters, to the film's narration based around Rob's many loves and losses, to his mentor and role model, Bruce Springsteen. The notion of "music as life" is executed by insisting upon popular music's sociological importance and is further supported by Rob's organization of his records in personal chronological order. This "great reorganization" requires that he recall when and why he bought each record in his collection. The reorganization of Rob's records according to his life's events symbolizes the film's central themes of obsession, regression, and lack of emotional development. Their purchase often involved a girl or girlfriend's presence in his life. This revelation to himself and to the audience, as well as his newly found state of being dumped, encourage Rob to revisit his "top five all time break ups" as the autobiographical markers of his life's direction. For this reason, my analysis of the film will parallel the story's chronological order, and will be in accordance with Rob's recounting of his life's events, while respecting that the music and songs that narrate his relationships also tell the story of the film.

We quickly learn from Rob's experience with women that he is not a wonderful human being and is quite emotionally arrested. But he has ideals and strong beliefs and is able to rationalize bad deeds as the stumblings of youth and just plain dumbness. The fact that Rob becomes aware of his own foolishness and egocentrism allows his actions to be somewhat forgivable. As reviewer Andy Medhurst (2000) points out, "the analysis never shifts into real critique, preferring gently and superficially to chide Rob's

immaturity and fecklessness while massively endorsing him in the process” (p. 36). The prominence of self-awareness and analysis is evidenced in the film’s dialogue, direct-address style, and song-to-scene selection.

### *Lyrics and Love*

The very first sound of *High Fidelity* is the unmistakable scratchings of a record beginning to play accompanied shortly thereafter by the image of a spinning record. Music and listening to music are paramount to *High Fidelity*; this is our first lesson and introduction to the film. Rob Gordon has his earphones on and is looking quite miserable as he listens to the 13<sup>th</sup> Floor Elevators’ *You’re Gonna Miss Me Baby*. The song is about heartbreak and loss and is essentially angry and full of hurt as the lyrics scream “You’re gonna wake up wonderin’, find yourself all alone, but what’s gonna stop me, baby? I’m not comin’ home.” Rob includes us in his musings about which came first, “the music or the misery” (Erickson, 1966). His girlfriend is moving out, and all over his apartment there are signs of his pop culture obsessions - music posters and records strewn about. He is surrounded by music, just as the film itself is entrenched in music.

English professor David R. Pichaske (1999) recognizes the important role that popular music has assumed in America. Pichaske says that “popular music fills the need of most Americans for poetry” (p. 90). Like poetry, lyrics and music have taken on various social and political battles and in this way have regularly challenged the status quo. Music also has the ability to reach people in very different ways than the written word. Moreover, in a study undertaken by Pichaske, songs and lyrics are more easily memorized and called upon, and the combined effects of lyrics, rhythm and

instrumentalization have a greater capacity to penetrate and transform the listener. Pichaske claims that rock songs have taken over where poetry left off in their ability to expand and manipulate emotion through sound, pitch, tempo, and volume (Pichaske, 1999). Thus selecting what song to listen to is more likely to be a person's response when seeking solace or a reflection of one's current state of emotion, than attempting to recall a poem with which to identify. The power of rock songs is demonstrated within *High Fidelity*, as the film is punctuated by moments of remembering and reflection directly associated with songs and lyrics. This is underlined when Rob recounts his significant relationships; music accompanies the memory both in Rob's mind and in the film. Rob then launches into a list of his top five worst and most painful break-ups.

Rob's first break-up takes us back to his days as an inexperienced 14-year old when, in his words, "boys suddenly realized they wanted something from girls." Bow Wow Wow's *I Want Candy* can be heard in the background echoing Rob's statement that he didn't know exactly what he wanted from girls, but he knew it was something, and that something might involve their newly developed breasts. The lyrics spell out this new desire quite explicitly: "I like candy when it's wrapped in a sweater. Someday soon I'll make you mine, Then I'll have candy all the time" (Berns, 1983). After his first girlfriend leaves him suddenly for another "man," he muses,

It would be nice to think that since I was fourteen times have changed, relationships have become more sophisticated. Females less cruel, skins thicker, instincts more developed. But there seems to be an element of that afternoon in everything that's happened to me since. All my romantic stories are a scrambled version of that first one. (2000)

This statement sets the tone for the music and storytelling of the film as we begin with *I Want Candy* and then remember when “rock was young” with Elton John’s *Crocodile Rock*.

Rob introduces us to his next great love, Penny Hardwick, by listing her top five recording artists, Elton John being one of them. That he defines her by and remembers her musical preferences indicates that his passion for music is longstanding. *Crocodile Rock* illustrates their relationship well; the lyrics tell of youth having fun, dancing, and holding hands and what was a more innocent relationship. However Rob has moved beyond the pleasures of innocence and he needs more. Rob and Penny kiss while Joan Jett’s *Crimson and Clover* is playing - a song that is laden with words of lust and desire. Penny and Rob break up because Rob’s sexual needs aren’t met. This is paralleled and emphasized by the music as Penny’s theme of *Crocodile Rock* and fresh facedness clashes with Rob’s *Crimson and Clover*, consigning him to the role of typical adolescent. This is a strong example of how music in *High Fidelity* functions on two levels: as a filmic device to enhance the story, and within the story itself, because Rob and his record store friends use taste as a measure of a person’s rank. Furthermore, the juxtapositioning of *Crocodile Rock* and *Crimson and Clover* in this film is truly reflective of the concurrent trends of ‘80s music, permitting the *High Fidelity* soundtrack to stand in as a musical artifact.

#### *The Record Store: A Prescription for Taste and Knowledge*

Rob owns a record store called “Championship Vinyl.” The store caters to a specialized, mostly male clientele who engage in collecting records as obscure as

“deleted Smith singles and original not re-released Frank Zappa Albums” (2000). Rob admits that he is a part of this group of fanatic record collectors who fetishize these rare albums. The obscurity of the coveted albums is emphasized when shop worker, Dick, claims he had a good weekend because he found “the first Licorice Comfits album over at “Vintage Vinyl” – the one on Testament of Youth, never released here. Japanese import only” (2000). Dick plays a *Belle and Sebastian* album in the store and is immediately criticized by Barry who calls it “sad bastard music.” Barry replaces it with his ‘Monday morning mix tape’, which begins with Katrina and the Waves’ not so cool *Walking on Sunshine*. The song is not what the audience would expect to hear on Barry’s tape given that he sees himself as an authority on great music. This big hit of the ‘80s now has kitsch value and is therefore cool. Dick then expresses his preference for Mitch Rider and the Detroit Wheels which Barry says is “bullshit,” at which point Rob asks how it can be “bullshit to state one’s opinion.” Barry’s outrage that Dick would prefer the music of another band rather than the Righteous Brothers underlines the narrowness of prescribed taste and the need to be a part of a unified community, as discussed in Chapter 2.

The rules of music knowledge are made even more transparent when a customer comes in searching for Stevie Wonder’s *I Just Called To Say I Love You* for his daughter and Barry refuses to sell him the record. Calling the record “sentimental tacky crap,” he refers the man to the generic mall. Barry claims that the customer offended him with his terrible taste. The offense was evidently so great that it was more important to take a stand against ignorance rather than make a sale. This entire scene speaks to the importance of establishing one’s taste and knowledge of music and musicians and the



fact that in this world of the record store, there are clearly correct and incorrect preferences. For, as Rob later informs us, “what really matters is what you like, not what you are like. Books, records, films – these things matter” (2000).

### *The Cool Factor*

From the very first seconds of *High Fidelity* there is a prescription for what is cool. Listening to music on vinyl is cool. Having an enormous collection of records is cool. Knowing everything there is to know about musicians and albums is cool. This of course requires that one appreciate older music to be able to draw the map of what preceded what and where sounds originated. And so, vintage is cool. However, all three characters are not as cool as they believe themselves to be. Rob’s tendency to lean towards the obsessive and clueless, Dick’s weak and defenseless character and Barry’s abrasive personality and apparent lack of friends beyond the store create a trio of outcasts who find comfort by remaining among the things they know best. And yet their superior attitudes and cultural tastes inform us that, despite being similar to one another, their uniqueness lies in separating themselves from the masses.

Writer Daniel Harris (1999) associates this kind of disengaged nonchalant coolness with middle class white youth.

Suburban coolness, in short, is mean-street behavior without mean streets, the bedroom community in search of the ghetto, the inner city bused into the burbs for a party on a cul-de-sac, where it has become part of the imposture of privileged youths desperate to rid themselves of what they perceive as the taint of inauthenticity. (p. 40)

Harris goes on to say that suburban coolness transforms shopping into scavenging, which is certainly the case with Barry, Rob and Dick, who are incessantly on the hunt for buried

treasure albums, and clothing for Barry. Shopping beyond the generic mall “strips consumption of its materialism by portraying it as the ingenious foraging of a new type of inner-city bottom feeder, an urban hunter-gatherer” (Harris, 1999, p. 40). The essence of the record store itself is to be distinct and removed from the music buyers who do not know as much as they should, which is precisely why Barry sends a customer to the mall to find *I Just Called To Say I Love You*. The film’s soundtrack is partial to this attitude of coolness. For example, with regards to Stevie Wonder, Barry questions whether or not a formerly great artist should be punished for his “latter day sins.” The soundtrack, while not including *I Just Called To Say I Love You*, still celebrates Stevie Wonder and by adding *I Believe When I Fall In Love With You* to its playlist.

Coolness takes the traditional consumer cycle – the rapid decline of a recently purchased article of clothing or appliance from ultra-modern newness to decrepit obsolescence – and reverses it, making the waste product itself, not the brand-new acquisition, the valuable commodity; the piece of detritus the coveted item. (Harris, 1999, p. 41)

Harris says that the obsession with kitsch is essential to coolness because second-hand and used items are removed from the taint of mainstream and consumerism as their lack of newness alters their status. The same can be said of much of the music appreciated and celebrated by *High Fidelity*’s soundtrack. The music that is beyond the mainstream and unheard on Top 40 radio, which includes both older music and some new and underground music, is the much lauded variety. ‘Cool’ involves the appeal of the less popular and this also translates to physical appearance, as aesthetics of beauty and normalcy are readily challenged, offering a seemingly more inclusive world (Harris, 1999). *High Fidelity* makes it plain that although ‘cool’ might be forgiving and accepting of the characters’ type B personalities and appearances, certain other rules

about cultural knowledge and self-awareness come into play. “Coolness is an aesthetic of insignia, of trademarks, of the passwords and Masonic handshakes through which card-carrying initiates gain entrance to the clubhouse” (Harris, 1999, p. 48).

### *Music as a Time Machine*

John Cusack’s character, Rob revisits his relationship with Sarah who is played by Lily Taylor. John Cusack starred with Taylor in *Say Anything* in 1988 where the two played best friends in high school. In 2000, in *High Fidelity*, once again they have a relationship based on comfort and dependence. Bruce Springsteen’s *The River* accompanies Rob’s look back at this particular relationship. This is a song that tells of two high school lovers who had to stay together because of circumstance, just as Rob and Sarah had come together because they were dumped and crushed by their previous relationships. The music that coincides with Rob’s memory of his relationship with Sarah does not reveal their exact relationship, but corresponds to feelings of convenience and commitment for reasons other than love. The use of *The River* is an illustration of the way a song’s lyrics carry meaning external to the film, while at the same time complementing the scene in which it appears.

It is clear up to this point in the film, that the songs used throughout *High Fidelity* have mirrored and referred to the onscreen action. The lyrics are not always audible or entirely analogous, nor does the music overtake the film, but each song’s lyrical and rhythmic motif corresponds to the tone and mood of each scene. We next see Rob in the middle of a sort of fortress of records when he reveals that he is organizing his records autobiographically. In the same way that Rob is sorting his records according to his

life's events, the soundtrack serves as a parallel to this storytelling both in terms of the songs' original release dates and that the music is a reflection of filmic events. When Rob is remembering the '80s, we are with him through the images onscreen as well as through the music. This same song-to-scene parallel occurs when Rob describes a relationship that took place in the '90s, and Liz Phair's *Baby Got Going* accompanies the flashback.

Back at the record store, Rob and his friends are listing their top five side one – track one songs. Rob lists The Velvet Underground, Nirvana, Massive Attack and Marvin Gaye, which Barry dissects as obvious and as a “sly declaration of new classic status slipped into a list of old safes ones” (2000). He asks how someone “who has no interest in music can own a record store?” Barry is most certainly the extreme of this taste-biased attitude. He refuses to sell a customer a particular record for weeks, then sells it to a friend who he knows has the capacity to truly appreciate the record's meaning, value, and ownership. This friend qualifies Dick, Barry and Rob as snobs and elitists and as the “unappreciated scholars” who disregard the people who know less than they do. Despite mild protests of each being labeled a snob, the three agree in unison that “those who know less than them” encompass everyone. In this scene, the themes of self-awareness and knowledge come to the fore once again. As all three characters admit, in their half-hearted denial, they are music snobs who know more than everyone else.

After a sleepless night filled with disturbing thoughts of his most recent ex-girlfriend, Laura, with another man, Rob is sitting behind his counter looking dejected as Love sings “won't somebody please help me with my misery” (Lee, 1969) audibly and distinctly. The song overemphasizes Rob's obvious state of misery, and when

compounded with Rob's dejected facial expression, becomes humorous. After this, we finally learn of Rob's first meeting with Laura, the woman who prompted his reexamination and revaluation of his life's direction. Rob met Laura at a club where he used to DJ, where he was clearly in his element as he selected the sounds to be heard and appreciated by his personally molded audience. When they first met, Rob offered to make Laura a mix tape, symbolic of his likes and dislikes and allowing him to share his passion and knowledge with someone who might be important. The mix tape features predominantly in *High Fidelity*, as it is Rob's way of expressing himself, at the same time as it is representative of the compilation that is the soundtrack. In the flashback sequence, Rob's indiscretions and wrong doings are revealed and we learn why Laura left him. He comes across as a mediocre kind of person who isn't necessarily likeable, but who has not committed any unforgivable sins. He is less respectable, though still relatable. The Velvet Underground's *Who Loves the Sun* comes on at this point, with lyrics of melancholy and a general disregard for everything "since you broke my heart" (Reed, 1970). Rob is somehow still capable of wondering why he is doomed to be left by women, despite his having admitted to being an "asshole" and committing the acts that led to the break up. Enter Bruce Springsteen.

### *Spreading the Word*

Upon hearing that his first so-called girlfriend at the age of fourteen married the boy she left him for, Rob feels relieved and as though he is at fate's mercy. Encouraged, he decides he will revisit all of the relationships on his all time top five list in the hopes that this will relieve some of the guilt or pain he has harbored all these years. The idea is

reminiscent to Rob of a great Springsteen song. Bruce appears riffing on his guitar and encourages Rob to call the exes and see if they've forgiven him. Springsteen has widely been referred to as the "voice of the American everyday man." He is symbolic of wholesome, American, unequivocal heterosexual masculinity, and the coolness of rock and roll. Bruce Springsteen makes sense as Rob's mentor, advising him to "give that final good luck and goodbye to your all time top five and just move on down the road" (2000). It's quite a compelling and catchy idea coming from The Boss himself.

In the following scene, Barry is convincing a record store customer to buy all the albums he thinks every serious collector must own. Aretha Franklin's *Rock Steady* is playing in the background as Dick introduces Anna Moss, played by *Roseanne* star Sarah Gilbert, to one of Greenday's influential bands, Stiff Little Fingers. Dick puts the album on and the two roll their eyes at an unknowing customer who asks if it is the new Greenday album, despite the fact that this is clearly a new revelation to Anna. Now that she is in the know, she can belittle the uninformed, another example of the characters' musical snobbery. It is also an example of how knowledge and being informed provide social exchange value and create peer groups. Meanwhile, Barry continues to stack record upon record upon his new protégé customer, reassuring him that "everything is going to be okay", as he instructs him in the ways of music and a new way of life. Rob confidently tells Dick that he will now "sell five copies of *The Three E.P.'s* by the Beta Band," as the gospel is spread by all three record store workers. Following this, *Dry the Rain* overtakes the record store, and the customers/listeners are literally swayed. This scene at the record store is another example of the way music is prominent both because it is the subject of the onscreen dialogue, and because it is being played and heard by the

characters and the audience simultaneously. When convincing customers to buy the Beta Band album, the audience is also encouraged to learn about and appreciate the band. The appearance of *Dry the Rain* on the film's soundtrack is explicative of the way in which soundtrack is both interior and exterior to *High Fidelity*.

One following day, Rob goes to work and is wounded by a skateboarder. Showing his age and lack of youth status cool, Rob half lunges at the younger skaters and limps into his store. Barry and Dick are listening to a tape that both impresses and disturbs them as they tell Rob it was made by two of the skaters outside the store. They seem to have great difficulty accepting that the music was created by younger and decidedly less knowledgeable adolescents, who earlier in the film had shoplifted records Rob was convinced were for other people. The skaters had accused Rob of being bigoted because he thought he knew what they should be listening to. This discrepancy between what the record store workers think they know about today's youth culture and what youth culture is actually like, is now further exacerbated by the fact that the young skaters are making music that is being appreciated by the "professional appreciators." Rob approaches the skaters and tells them that their tape is good, a fact of which they are already aware, and that he will release their record. Rob's decision to produce a record, rather than purchase, sell, or critique one, is reflective of his readiness to move forward.

#### *Releasing the Record*

After learning of Laura's father's death, Rob, Barry and Dick pay tribute by listing their top five songs about death. Barry brings up *You Can't Always Get What You Want* by the Rolling Stones which Dick instantly disqualifies because of its association

with *The Big Chill*. Barry seems very embarrassed that he did not remember this affiliation.

There is some level of transparency created when the characters' dialogue directly addresses film soundtracks and particular song to film associations, especially within a film that is so entrenched in its own dialogue about music. The audience is almost included in the kinds of discussions and debates that likely occurred over what music could be applied to the film's soundtrack. One of the rules of soundtrack production appears to be the avoidance of any song that is either overused or overtly representative of another film. Despite this, Queen's *We Are the Champions* finds its way onto the soundtrack as does *Walking On Sunshine*. The relaying of some soundtrack rules to the audience and demonstrations of self-awareness somehow exonerate this slip. At the funeral of Laura's father, Rob tells us the songs he would like to hear at his own funeral; they are all from the '60s and '70s as were most of the songs listed by Barry and Dick at the record store. The inclination towards appreciating older music is apparent throughout the film and in all of the characters' discussions about music, and more importantly on the soundtrack. While there is ascribed merit in knowing this music, there is also a pervading sense of the music's superiority. This idea is repeated throughout the film's dialogue and song selection. The Velvet Underground is featured more than once in the film and the appearance of music by artists like Aretha Franklin, the Kinks, Barry White, and Love is evidence of the soundtrack's predilection for the music of this time.

When Rob leaves the funeral, it is raining and Bob Dylan's *Most of the Time* accompanies the scene. At the end of every stanza, "most of the time" follows various



statements about overcoming the end of a relationship: "I don't even notice she's gone, most of the time. And I don't even think about her most of the time. I don't even care if I ever see her again most of the time" (Dylan, 1989). The song indicates Rob's continual desire to be with Laura. Despite the fading and dulling of the pain he has felt in her absence, he regularly thinks of her. Rob and Laura decide to reunite and the montage of their reunion is accompanied by the much more hopeful and optimistic lyrics of Jackie Wilson's *I Get the Sweetest Feeling*: "With every passing day I love you more in every way. I'm in love to stay," (Evelyn & McCoy, 1966).

Laura plans a record release party for Rob's new label and group, and as soon as Rob learns of the event, he goes to great lengths to try to undo all of the arrangements that have been made. The Kinks' *Everybody's Gonna Be Happy* speaks to the solidification of the event as all those confronted by Rob are clearly undeterred and are "gonna be happy," as the lyrics state. Rob's apprehension is explained to him by Laura. She understands that by making and producing something, Rob is in direct conflict with his desire to be the eternal critic; he is exposing himself. When doing an interview with a newspaper columnist, Rob uses Laura's words, calling himself a "professional appreciator". The columnist asks Rob what his top five all time favourite records are and Rob defers to the mix tape once again to express himself, explaining the rules and key elements of a successful compilation. He says that, "first of all, you are using someone else's poetry to express how you feel. This is a delicate thing" (2000). This statement once again encourages the audience to hear this double entendre as this is true of all soundtracks: how lyrics, rhythm, mood, parallel, and dissonance can offer great

variation as well as harmony to a film. This is a delicate art whose abuses and misuses have been taken into consideration by the creators of *High Fidelity*.

At the record release party, Barry's newly formed band will play, much to Rob's dismay. However, Barry Jive and the Uptown Five perform *Let's Get It On* and are surprisingly professional. Rob, in a most 'uncool' manner, starts clapping above his head in a move designed to make the audience cringe and look away, as Rob is revealed as an aged, sentimental sap. The following and final scene of *High Fidelity* brings us full circle to Rob with his earphones on, redressing the rules of the mix tape. This tape is for Laura and Rob explains that this time he will include songs that he knows she likes and that will make her happy. Because he's "learned how to do that now." Rob seems to have matured because he has finally learned that not everything is about him and his needs. Now in his thirties, he is beginning to understand how to focus on another person. Rob is sitting in his chair with his earphones on as the movie ends with Stevie Wonder's *I Believe When I Fall In Love*... "with you it will be forever."

In the very last moments of the film, *High Fidelity* allows itself to submit to the conventions of the romantic comedy, as most romantic comedies end with the grand swell of the love song overcoming the final scene and the theatre (Garwood, 2002). This is what audiences seem to like. In keeping with Rob's newfound understanding of what it means to do something for other people, the soundtrack offers the audience a nugget of appreciated conformity.

### *The Review*

*High Fidelity* does not necessarily implement a soundtrack of popular songs in an innovative manner to create depth and complexity. The songs that are heard are either directly related to record store conversations, in that we are hearing what the characters say they are playing, or are serving as an anchor to the scene; reflecting moods and emotions related to onscreen events. Where the music of *High Fidelity* becomes interesting is in its role as a reflection of the nostalgic dialogue about music, which bolsters the importance of knowing and appreciating music's roots. For these reasons, the setting of the record store provides a framework for variety and inclusiveness. We hear rock and soul from the '60s and '70s, pop from the '80s, non-commercial rap by artists such as De La Soul and The Roots, and indie-electronic bands like Stereolab and the Beta Band. The film does not rely on current music, but instead dips into the archives and also includes newer, more marginal music. In this way, the soundtrack itself is emblematic of prescribed music taste and knowledge. And just as the characters appear to be hip and cool, while allowing some moments of ineptitude to slip through, the soundtrack purveys an overriding sense of connoisseurship and self-awareness alongside moments of weakness by including songs like *We Are the Champions*, *Ooh Baby I Love Your Way*, and *Walking on Sunshine*. The song choices are not obvious ones, as this would break their rules of the compilation. Instead, they help maintain the dialogue between what is happening in music now and what preceded it. And so the two-tier effect of music in *High Fidelity* is accomplished both through the dialogue and the diegesis.

Another film's penchant for nostalgia where the soundtrack contains archival music and implements music in a less overt and literal style is Wes Anderson's *Rushmore*. This film will be discussed in the following chapter.

#### Chapter 4: *Rushmore*: A World of Timeless Nostalgia

Several film critics and reviews have suggested that director and writer Wes Anderson has generated a film genre all his own. Interviewer Charlie Rose and critic Pete Travers accredit this genre to Anderson's directorial precision and style encompassed in his creation of new archetypes, his use of sets, costumes, soundtrack and overall film aesthetic. His films, co-written with actor/writer Owen Wilson, involve scheming and good-hearted mischief, neither of which are realistic or rational but seem to make sense within the microcosms he creates. In *Bottle Rocket* (1996), the protagonists decide to rob a bookstore, not exactly a moneymaking enterprise. In *Rushmore* (1998), the film's young star attempts to woo a teacher many years his senior and befriends a middle-aged steel tycoon. The head of the family of *The Royal Tannenbaums* (2001) tries to win back his estranged wife and children by pretending to have stomach cancer, employing his elevator operator as his pretend doctor. And in Anderson's most recent film, *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou* (2005), the lead character desires to hunt down the magical shark that ate his best friend. All of Anderson's films employ acute attention to detail and a good dose of whimsy. His is a genre that strays from the commonplace, unless the commonplace is ironic and humorous. Anderson's genre also asserts the place of music as equal to, if not more important than, the narrative. His films are best described as unique paradigms, where the nonsensical is befitting and where characters begin and end with themselves.

The creation of self-contained worlds is evident in all of Anderson's films as well as in the films' soundtracks. An essence of timelessness and nostalgia that are felt

simultaneously is part of these worlds. The characters' costumes and manner of speaking are extremely affected and reminiscent of a previous era. However, the plot never dictates a specific time or place, and this, as well as the characters' behaviours, contribute to the film's quality of timelessness and agelessness. Feelings of nostalgia are inherent to each of Anderson's films because of the overwhelming sense of wistfulness that is a part of all of his creations. Longing and a desire to return to a previous time or moment are elements of nostalgia that are felt by many characters found in Anderson's movies and are paralleled in the films' retro soundtracks. It is a kind of timeless nostalgia that is emotive and stylized. The nostalgic, wistful quality of his characters, and over-the-top antics and eventual quiet resignation, imbue Wes Anderson's films and contribute to a unique genre and world.

#### *Nostalgia and Retro Trends*

Frederic Jameson (1984) comments on nostalgic films in his analysis of *American Graffiti* and *Rumble Fish*. He says that these films desperately try to lay claim to a past that no longer exists. These nostalgic films glom onto versions of the 1950s as a stable and prosperous decade, and as one of idealism, with countercultural youth and rock and roll movements leading the way. The past is conveyed through representations of fashion, glossy images, and various other signposts of that decade. Nostalgic films evidently reference other historic time periods as well. The commonality of nostalgic films is that their discourse attempts "to lay siege either to our own present and immediate past, or to a more distant history that escapes individual existential memory," (Jameson, 1984, p. 67). Some nostalgic films may be ideological in their reframing of

history, while others focus on style rather than social commentary. They “approach the past through stylistic conotation,” (Jameson, 1984, p. 67) conveying nostalgia via retrograde means.

Over the last fifteen years in North America, retrograde style has been a trend infiltrating almost all commercial industries, manifesting itself in a variety of different forms. The referencing of the past is essential to retro and typically signals 1960s and ‘70s youth culture. However, retro trends are also evident in hip hop music, specifically in its sampling of a great deal of funk from the 1970s. The music, clothing and furniture styles of 1940s and ‘50s have also made their way into the industry of retro (Thorne, 2003). The brief success of bands like Big Bad Voodoo Daddy and The Brian Setzer Orchestra in the late 1990s are confirmation of the revaluation of ‘40s and ‘50s swing and its appreciation by younger generations. Christian Thorne (2003) remarks that:

The most important point to be made about this form of retro is that it is an unabashedly nationalist project; it sets out to create a distinctively U.S. idiom, one redolent of Fordist prosperity, an American aesthetic culled from the American century, a version of Yankee high design able to compete, at last, with its vaunted European counterparts. (p. 103)

*Rushmore* moves beyond this narrow capitalist use of retro style and music, firstly by referencing British bands rather than American bands. Secondly, the songs that are on the film’s soundtrack are not overused or highly familiar songs, but instead expand the typical canon of British Invasion music. And finally, because *Rushmore* is wholly nostalgic and does not reference a specific time period, it does not indulge in the use of retro for its commercial and superficial value. Instead, *Rushmore* relies on nostalgic feelings of longing and hopefulness to tell its story.

### *Preconceptions of Music*

Anderson had decided upon *Rushmore*'s entire soundtrack before filming had even begun, and during almost every scene, the song that would later accompany the scene was played so that the mood was created for the actors. Anderson says of the music in his films:

I plan that stuff out before we shoot, so I try to play a lot of the songs during the scenes. If it's a scene that doesn't have dialogue, then we'll play that during it, the track. And if it does have dialogue, then we'll sometimes play a song, then cut it right before. So it's kind of setting the mood on the set. (Anderson, 1998)

The soundtrack and each individual song were crucial to writers Wes Anderson and Owen Wilson, and were developed as an essential element to every filmic moment of *Rushmore*. Actor Jason Schwartzman was given a copy of the soundtrack prior to filming as a means of understanding how to engage in each individual scene and said that, "it put it together in such a clear way for me. I guess music, I really relate to the music and it just hit me. I just knew how I was going to do it" (1998). Anderson explained that he had originally wanted to score the entire film to music by The Kinks. This vision of the music worked in part because the band wore jackets and ties like the protagonist, and also because it would help exploit feelings of being an angry teenager, as The Kinks' music is loud, angry teenage rock. Anderson expanded on this idea to include a variety of British Invasion bands because they almost all dressed this way and because this then offered a richer sampling of British Invasion rock.

British Invasion is a music movement that began in England in the mid- 1960s and whose popularity quickly spread to the United States. However, it was not known as 'British Invasion' until it literally invaded the rest of the world, and particularly the U.S. The style, and sometimes the actual music of the British Invasion bands, was taken from



American rock, and then returned to its original source, revitalized and renewed. Media Studies theorist Keir Keightley (2001) observes that “there is a recurring sense that the Invasion bands represented a revivalist sensibility; that they were re- presenting a lost musical spirit with a new twist and a new seriousness previously foreign to the Top 40’s” (p. 118). Anderson appears to possess in-depth knowledge of music from this time period, as the soundtracks of his other films all rely on ‘60s and ‘70s rock. Furthermore, Anderson’s knowledge surpasses the average understanding of British Invasion music, including songs on the soundtrack far outside of the well-known canon. The nostalgic tone of his films as reflected through the dialogue, characters, sets and costumes is compounded by the music. The songs do not seem out of place or nonsensical, but instead fit within Anderson’s original creations.

*Rushmore* functions as a very different kind of film from *High Fidelity* and, as a result, its contribution to the dialogue about film and their soundtracks is unique. Because *High Fidelity* is a film about music, the characters and their opinions inform both the film’s and the soundtrack’s attitudes about music. *Rushmore*, on the other hand, gives the viewer a prescription for nostalgia and its soundtrack is only one of the vehicles the film employs to accomplish this. *Rushmore* does not engage in an explicit conversation about music, but instead utilizes music as a parallel narrative, sometimes in accordance with the onscreen action and dialogue, and other times as a replacement for the dialogue altogether. For the most part, the songs accompany montage sequences, of which there are many, and further the story by connecting scenes together through the use of particular lyrics, rhythms and moods. Because this is an essential function of the soundtrack in *Rushmore*, it is important to create a context for the various montages and

character development in order to explicate the relevance of the songs and their innovative use. This necessitates that my analysis of the soundtrack, as well as my examination of how nostalgia is embedded in the overall structure of the film, occur within a plot-summary format.

*Rushmore: A Contained World of Timeless and Original Characters*

*Rushmore* is a film about a hapless fifteen-year-old prep school student who falls in love with a teacher and befriends a middle-aged, downhearted steel tycoon. The film opens with a painting of Bill Murray's character, Herman Blume. Mr. Blume and his family are depicted: his wife, his two obnoxious sons and Mr. Blume himself, smoking a cigarette. Mark Mothersbaugh, former member of the band Devo, composed the score for this film and one of his original compositions accompanies our introduction to the cast of characters. The band Devo is one of new wave's most successful and cutting edge bands that went on to become a cult sensation. In the same way that Devo's music was innovative and fresh, so are Mothersbaugh's compositions for Anderson's films, contributing to Anderson's unique style, cult following and success.

*Rushmore* opens as a play; curtains part on the first act in the month of September. We are introduced to the irrepressible and enthusiastic Max Fischer, a student at Rushmore Academy, played by first time actor, Jason Schwartzman. Max looks like a mod character out of the 1960s, complete with his neatly cut and styled hair, thick black-framed glasses, and a high school blazer and tie. In accordance with mod style, Max's hair is meticulously clipped and geometrically edged around the ears and at the nape of the neck. His clothes also convey a sense of nostalgia, providing a means for

Wes Anderson to point out that blazers and ties were the dress code of many British Invasion bands. The parallel between Max's appearance and that of British Invasion bands contributes to the insular world of the film and is essentially nostalgic because of its referencing of the '60s and '70s. The essence of this enclosed world is deepened by the fact that there is no delineation of specific time or place. To place Rushmore Academy in a specific city or state would necessitate the addressing of certain realities that would alter the fable-like quality of Rushmore. The writers recognize that the sense of time in the film is ambiguous in that the film is taking place now, but it could easily be taking place twenty years ago.

Mr. Blume is a Rushmore Academy alumnist and the millionaire owner of a steel factory. Upon meeting Max for the first time, Blume comments that Max is a "sharp little guy." In reality he is the school's worst student and something of a misfit. One review of *Rushmore* describes Max's character well: "What makes Max prodigious is not that he excels at one thing but that he is contagiously moderate at a heap of things" (Lane, 1998, p. 214). Anderson and Wilson wrote Max's character to be constantly scheming and planning new projects. The quality of relentlessness is executed in an extremely appealing and interesting way. The characters are likeable because they seem to be impervious to the derision of others and find pleasure in doing what they like:

They might do stuff that other people would think is ridiculous or people might even feel embarrassed for them, but they're sort of resilient and they're not really trying to be cool. They're just trying to do their own kind of own projects. (Anderson, 1998).

The character of Max is decidedly not cool in that he is not a member of the disaffected generation X club. Instead, he shows and acts out his emotions and is constantly striving to accomplish his own goals. But he is an academic failure.

Max writes, directs and acts in extremely complicated plays full of adult content. This particular talent is an example of how Max's character could not make sense in any other film. Max's nostalgic plays are his claim to fame. Unlike typical high school plays such as *Macbeth* or *Death of a Salesman*, Max's plays are set in the '60s or '70s and involve rifles, dynamite, cocaine and war. They are complicated technically and in relation to their mature subject matter. One of his plays is a stage version of *Serpico* with more props and effects than a normal high school play. What is interesting about Max's plays is that they are often plays based on films, while *Rushmore* is filmed with elements of the stage, curtains, costumes, props and acts indicated by the month of the year. Wes Anderson admits that the "set is completely out of proportion with anything that you would normally see at a high school production ... but it's part of Max's ability to generate the funding for these projects" (Anderson, 1998). Max revisits movie classics, adhering to similar notions as *High Fidelity*; that what came before is inherently superior. His latest play is entitled *Heaven and Hell* and is set in Vietnam, looking much like *Platoon*, *Full Metal Jacket* and *Apocalypse now*, packed with choppers, flame throwers, machine guns, enemy fire, and even requires that the audience put on the safety glasses located beneath their seats. The absurdity, hilarity and nostalgia of these plays are some of the essential, original elements of Max' character and of *Rushmore*.

Max is a student ahead of his time. Despite the obvious eccentricities most modern day high schools would deem worthy of social outcast status, the students at

Rushmore partake in Max's clubs and societies and willingly get involved with his numerous, edgy high school plays. Max's speech and entire manner is affected. Most of his clubs involve some type of costume or prop, further separating him from the average teenager. In fact, each character in *Rushmore* has a uniform and when they are subject to a life-altering event, their uniform changes. Mr. Blume has his matching shirt and tie, Max has his blazer and khakis, and his father has his barbershop coat. When Mr. Blume leaves his wife, his polished matching shirt and tie are exchanged for a frumpy, bedraggled leisure suit. When Max becomes successful, his blazer and tie are traded in for a green velvet suit. The characters are also distinguished from one another by their diverse backgrounds, ethnicities, ages, and occupations: there is an English schoolteacher, a Scottish student, an Asian girl, an Indian groundskeeper, and a fifty-year old millionaire. "They're these kinds of whole different physical types ... you could almost just draw a picture of them and you'd have a whole sense of the character" (Anderson, 1998).

Max's father, Bert Fischer (Seymour Cassell), is the owner of a barbershop where Max works. The shop is a throwback to barbershops of an earlier time, fully equipped with a record player and black-and-white photos adorning the wall. When Bert Fischer is introduced, there is jazz music playing in the background and Bert's glasses are similar to jazzman, Dave Brubeck's glasses. However the jazz record being played is *Take Ten* by a member of Brubeck's band (Paul Desmond) rather than Dave Brubeck's all too familiar *Take Five*. Bert wears the standard barbershop jacket and so the shop and Max's father's appearance, continue to blur our perceived sense of time.

### *Music in the Absence of Dialogue*

The music in *Rushmore* is employed in two very specific ways. Music appears both to explain and enhance a character's feelings and behaviour, and to further the plot in the absence of dialogue. The songs either support the narrative or inform the narrative when there is no dialogue. There is rarely a moment in the film that is not accompanied by music. However, the film does not overuse or abuse music and songs largely because it consistently employs older music in a style that makes the songs feel new and fresh. In order to understand the montages and the use of music, it is important to understand where we are at in the film and in the characters' lives.

When we learn of Max's many extracurricular activities there is a definite music video quality as various clips of Max partaking in his many clubs and groups are strung together. The words on the screen indicate that Max is either the founder, president or director of most of these clubs, the most important being the Max Fischer Players. The first of many British Invasion tunes is heard as Creation's *Making Time* narrates this montage. It is an upbeat and fun song whose lyrics "making time, shooting lines for people to believe in ... why do we have to carry on, always singing the same old song" (Phillips & Pickett, 1967) tell of Max going through the same motions and activities he does every school year.

The film starts at the beginning of another high school year and Max has been put on sudden death academic probation because he has too many extracurricular activities and is failing nearly all of his classes. Max meets Rosemary Cross shortly thereafter, a teacher at Rushmore played by English actress Olivia Williams, who will later become the object of both Max's and Blume's intense affections. One of the film's themes is

water and its appearance begins here; Max is peering at Ms. Cross and we can hear the sounds of the ocean – waves crashing and seagulls singing. It is not yet clear if these sounds are associated with Ms. Cross' character or if they are in Max's head. The ocean sounds are external to all that is on the screen and their only association is with the Jacques Cousteau quote scrawled in a book by Ms. Cross. This element of the literal soundtrack functions in the same way that the insertion of a song would. We later learn that the sounds of the ocean are a part of Ms. Cross' internal dialogue because she is forever preoccupied by her dead husband's fondness for ocean life and adventure. While the ocean sounds appear out of nowhere, just as a song would, they offer insight into the character and the scene.

Max's affection for Ms. Cross quickly becomes apparent when after a conversation with her, Max determines to resurrect Latin at Rushmore, a subject he had tried to eliminate the previous year. He is completely smitten; he takes on petitions, meetings and debates, and his battle to keep Latin alive is fought to the lyrics of *Concrete and Clay* by Unit 2 + 4: "My love and I will be in love eternally. That's the way, mmm, that's the way it's meant to be" (Moeller & Parker, 1965). Once again, we are taken through scenes of Max engaging in his leadership activities, this time for the love of a woman as indicated by the song's lyrics.

The next music montage occurs at Mr. Blume's twins' birthday party. Although Mr. Blume and his wife are not divorced, his wife is sitting at a table with another man while Blume looks on forlornly. It is a troubled relationship, as is his relationship with his impossible and moronic sons. The Kinks' *Nothin' in This World Can Stop Me Worryin' 'Bout That Girl* accompanies the scene. Mr. Blume is having a poolside

cigarette as the song begins to play, but it is not entirely clear why this song is playing until Blume glances at his wife seated with another man, who glances back icily. “Met a girl fell in love mad as I can be” and “I found out, I was wrong she was just two-timing. I found out, I was wrong, she just kept on lying” (Davies, 1965) alludes to the situation, despite events to come when Blume is thrown out of his house for betraying his marriage. To escape present circumstances, Blume walks up to the diving board and jumps into the pool, cigarette still in mouth, and lets himself sink to the bottom, his body curled up in a tight little ball. While the audience does not yet know why Mr. Blume is such a miserable man, “the music as dialogic guide interprets and mediates these visual moments so that spectators may experience empathy through sound” (Ritter, 2000/01, p.168). This scene is another example of the way in which music and sound are utilized to further the story in the absence of dialogue.

The theme of water reappears as Max undertakes plans to build an aquarium in an effort to further please Ms. Cross after learning of her love of aquatic life forms. The theme of water is our only insight into Ms. Cross’ character. She is not as dynamic and interesting as other characters in the film. The water theme alludes to her dead husband and is a portal into her pain and unending love. *Summer Song* by Chad and Jeremy is a song about a brief relationship and the painful pangs felt at the end of summer and romance. The song overtakes the film in accompaniment to Max, wearing a hardhat in addition to his usual costume, formulating and executing his building plans for the aquarium. Wes Anderson explains that he found the song on a British Invasion compilation and upon hearing it, decided to make the whole soundtrack of songs from British Invasion bands. At the beginning of the song, the lyrics reflect the whimsy and



romance of a summer fling: “soft kisses on a summer's day, laughing all our cares away. Just you and I” (Metcalf, Noble & Stuart, 1964). However, what began with a pleasant sense of carefree turns to anguish and the irrational: “they say that all good things must end some day. Autumn leaves must fall but don't you know that it hurts me so to say goodbye to you. Wish you didn't have to go. No no no no” (1964). These lyrics speak to the film's subsequent sequence of events when what began as a typical teenage crush on a teacher transforms into obsession, competition and ruin. The tune and harmony of the song remain pleasant and nostalgic despite summer's end and love's loss. The pleasant and harmonious tune accompanying words of pain and longing mirrors the lightness and humour of the film despite its dark and psychotic moments. Max's obsessive tendencies quickly come to the fore as his devotion to Ms. Cross begins to feel like smothering both to the character and the audience. The song's portent is apt, as a triangle will soon be forged between Max, Ms. Cross and Mr. Blume.

Max begins attending public school after his plans to build an aquarium on the school's baseball diamond cost him an expulsion from Rushmore Academy. Heavy organ music covers the dialogue and parallels the severity of the situation. While one would assume that leaving Rushmore Academy would spell the end of Max Fischer, we find him still wearing his Rushmore uniform at Grover Cleveland, his new school. There his leadership skills appear unappreciated by his new peers. He has not yet undergone any psychological or emotional changes at this point in time, a state that is reflected in his costume. Max is determined to be successful at his new school while continuing to spend time with Ms. Cross and Mr. Blume. *Here Comes My Baby* by Cat Stevens is heard as scenes flash by of all three characters going about their daily routine. Max continues to

think of Ms. Cross while Ms. Cross and Mr. Blume have secretly embarked upon their own separate friendship. The lyrics “here comes my baby. Here she comes now. And it comes as no surprise to me, with another guy” (Stevens, 1967) allude to their burgeoning relationship. The song is upbeat and cheerful despite its lyrics of betrayal and obsession, again paralleling events to come in the same way as *A Summer Song*. The song accompanies scenes of Max in class, being tutored, and at the science fair with his project partner, Margaret Yang, whose unrequited feelings for Max parallel Max’s for Ms. Cross. The song continues into the next scene in this same montage with Max as the basketball team’s mascot, doing unbelievable gymnastics down the length of the court. This scene indicates that Max has found a way to be part of his new academic surroundings and also gives us one more serving of ludicrous and hilarious antics. Max has made himself yet another costume, although he still continues to wear his Rushmore blazer and khakis, and as the song illustrates, harbour feelings for Ms. Cross. The lyrics of *Here Comes My Baby* make even more sense when during the montage Ms. Cross and Mr. Blume’s affinity for one another is made clear we see the exchange of furtive glances while Max’s best friend, Dirk, is seated between them as a knowing witness.

The characters of Max, Mr. Blume and Dirk are not confined by the prescribed behaviour their ages normally dictate. Max acts under the pretenses of being an adult, as does Dirk, while Mr. Blume seems unable to grasp very much and acts out as an adolescent, hiding at the bottom of his own pool. He eventually takes Max on as his mortal enemy. These seemingly odd behaviours and attitudes contribute to the notion that *Rushmore* has created its own world and the retro and offbeat songs continue to enhance this feeling.

When Mr. Blume pays Ms. Cross a visit at her home under the pretense of discussing Max's many plans and undertakings, they go for a walk and are seen by Dirk, who confronts Mr. Blume and tells him it must stop. Co-writer, Owen Wilson dubs Dirk "the conscience of the movie," despite the fact that he is a small boy. Dirk is perched on his bicycle and takes on Mr. Blume's forbidding black monster of a Bentley. In *Rushmore*, this small boy has the courage and audacity to face a fifty-year-old steel tycoon as a man. Meanwhile throughout the film, Mr. Blume regularly acts in an adolescent and childlike manner, hiding behind trees, hopping fences, interfering in children's outdoor games and running recklessly across fields. Doubting Mr. Blume's integrity and claims of friendship, Dirk fumbles a famous line when he tells Mr. Blume "with friends like you, who needs friends" and spits on his car. These words are both highly confrontational and highly amusing, and are indicative of Dirk's whole character. When Dirk himself turns against Max, he writes Max an angry letter. Despite Dirk's bold and adult conduct, he writes the letter with a blue crayon in a child-like scrawl, informing Max of Mr. Blume and Ms. Cross' tryst. Again, this is reflective of Dirk's confused persona and of the film's fluidity of timelessness and agelessness.

Max is making a fire on Rushmore's grounds while *Jersey Thursday* by Donovan overtakes the scene. "In the tiny piece of coloured glass my love was born and reds and golds and yellows were the colours in the dawn. Night brought on its purple cloak of velvet to the sky and the girls go willing spinning on Jersey Thursday" (Leitch, 1965). Max's once hopeful love has turned into something dark, sinister, and beyond the scope of youthful obsession. This change is paralleled by the song's lyrics of dawn becoming night and is acted out in the next scene when Max tells Mr. Blume's wife of her

husband's affair. The song is one of only three moments in the film where a previously-released song is inserted to enhance a character's thoughts or emotions instead of depending upon a scenic montage.

The Who's *A Quick One While He's Away* accompanies *Rushmore*'s sequence of repeated revenge. Mr. Blume moves from his home into a hotel and Max takes his revenge to a new level, filtering bees from his bee keeping days into Blume's room through a tube under the door. After determining the origination of the bees, Mr. Blume smiles sardonically, seeming impressed, and ready to take on the challenge. Max is standing in the elevator of Blume's hotel in a hotel staff uniform with his box of bees. He emerges in slow motion as the very ominous and complex lyrics of the song are heard. The title of the song indicates secret, stealth and guilt while the lyrics that are included in this sequence tell of reunion and joy. In the next shot Mr. Blume destroys Max's bike by rolling over it with his car. Max then cuts Blume's brakes, crossing the line between prank and potential murder. The verse that accompanies this montage sings, "I can't believe it. Do my eyes deceive me? Am I back in your arms? Away from all harm? It's like a dream to be with you again. Can't believe that I'm with you again" (Townshend, 1967). Before shooting this montage, Anderson had already decided how the song was going to be edited. The song then cuts to the lyrics, "You are forgiven, you are forgiven, you are forgiven," as if each bad deed forgives the next and the original sin of betrayal. Max is arrested as the words of the song "you are forgiven" continue to be repeated.

### *Denouement*

The curtains open on the next scene with The Rolling Stones' *I Am Waiting*. Max is no longer wearing his Rushmore blazer. He is now wearing a winter jacket from the 1970s and a barber's jacket under that. He has given up on school altogether. The Stones sing "I am waiting, I am waiting. Waiting for someone to come out of somewhere. You can't hold out, you can't hold out," (Jagger & Richards, 1966) as this final montage depicts Max's altered daily routine. The sequence includes Dirk watching Max from his perch on his bike and later Margaret Yang visiting Max at his house. But Max will not come out. He is hiding and holding out, and the lyrics point to this and emphasize it through repetition. Max and his father are eating t.v. dinners while watching sports on a black and white t.v. The t.v. dinners and the black and white television obscure the film's sense of time once more.

After this sequence absent of dialogue, the curtains open on the film's second to last act. It is December and Christmastime. Max and his father close the barbershop and Dirk finally comes to see Max on friendly terms. Max and Mr. Blume also reunite; evidently Mr. Blume has turned to alcohol and not showering as a remedy for loneliness. Dirk takes Max kite flying in an attempt to bring him back to himself. It seems to work as Max is ready to take on his next project and instructs Dirk to take dictation for his next play, while he is flying a kite and Cat Stevens' *The Wind* begins to play. Max seems ready to take up where he left off, in his rightful place as creator and leader. The song's lyrics echo this sentiment of contentment and resignation: "I listen to the wind to the wind of my soul. Where I'll end up well I think, only God really knows" (Stevens, 1971).

When Max appears next, he is wearing a green velvet suit, his next costume after finding himself once again: “he is on the comeback,” (Schwartzman, 1998). He and the disheveled Mr. Blume renew their friendship and undertake their aquarium project together. Owen Wilson explains their friendship as one of complimentary equals rather than father and son. Mr. Blume’s “glazed expression sees no cause for hope in the world, whereas Jason Schwartzman’s level, myopic gaze sees nothing else” (Lane 1998, p. 216). They have created a dynamic wherein Bill Murray’s character looks up to Max and admires his drive and ambition. The writers find humour and compassion in the idea of “a grown man and a kid relating as contemporaries” (Wilson, 1998). John Lennon’s *Oh Yoko* is featured in this comeback montage, which at once invokes the woman who tore these two friends apart and at the same time, the woman whom they cannot let go. Max founds a new kite-flying society and embarks upon his next hit play.

The curtains part once more on opening night in the month of January, and all are in attendance at the school auditorium awaiting Max’s new play, *Heaven and Hell*. Every character that has been introduced is sitting in their seats at Grover Cleveland Public School. Even Ms. Cross finds herself in the auditorium, seated beside Mr. Blume. The Vietnam play is the climax of the movie because this is Max’s largest undertaking; all of the characters are there, and his comeback is complete.

At the cast party, Max has finally accepted his station in life, as master playwright, high school student, and son of a barber. Ms. Cross and Max begin dancing to Max’s request of The Faces’ *Ooh La La* as the film closes on people of all ages dancing in the high school gym. It is peculiar that Max would request this song. However, it is reflective of the director’s personal preference for and knowledge of ‘60s

and '70s rock. Anderson acknowledges the improbability of Max actually knowing the song but regardless, the curtains close on *Rushmore* in time for the wistful chorus of "I wish that I knew what I know now when I was younger. I wish that I knew what I know now when I was stronger" (Lane & Wood, 1973). It is a common sentiment, though not what one would expect to hear from a fifteen-year-old. But it has been made clear from the beginning of the film, that Max is not an average fifteen-year-old.

### *The Review*

Wes Anderson's *Rushmore* is truly a unique film with an original sensibility and execution. The film employs nostalgia in a way that does not reference an exact time, but rather plays on the emotions that are associated with nostalgia. Feelings of wistfulness, longing, and constant trial are associated with nostalgia, adolescence, and love – all the subject matter of many songs – and are reflected in the film's characters and soundtrack. The film's reliance on archival music requires an in-depth knowledge of older music, specifically non-canonical British Invasion music, once again demonstrating that nostalgia and archival knowledge go hand-in-hand. There are several moments in *Rushmore* when there is no dialogue and where songs are used to narrate the onscreen events or the emotions being felt by the characters. Thus *Rushmore*, through its concentration on British Invasion music from the '60s and '70s and its substitution of music for the film's narrative in several scenes, "alters the musical code to allow for an autonomy of soundtrack both within and without the film" (Ritter, 2000/01, p. 173). The film's overall nostalgic quality occurs because of the concurrent contributions of the music, costumes, dialogue and characters.

## Conclusion

“As a class, American workers are ‘older now, but still running against the wind,’ nurtured and sustained by a dialogue within popular music that enables them to remember the past and to imagine the future” (Lipsitz, 1990, p. 132).

This thesis began by examining the shifts and trends in the film soundtrack in an effort to appreciate and understand where the soundtrack is today and how the relationship between music and film has progressed. The purpose of tracing this chronology of popular song compilation soundtracks is to comprehend how previously-released popular songs can reinvigorate a soundtrack and a film. Moreover, we have seen that well-known and dated songs are able to offer even more depth and layer to a film because of their attachment and associations to a different time and way of life. A nostalgic essence is attributed to these songs because they draw upon feelings and memories of their original context and release, and because of the way they can be differently utilized in a film’s soundtrack.

The intention of this thesis has been to address a nostalgic sensibility in film and music, both as a means of moving away from the mainstream and as an identification of musical taste. This nostalgia fully partakes of the values of youth and rock culture, inasmuch as it embodies rock culture’s desire to distinguish itself from a standardized music culture. The nostalgia of which I speak is not authentic nostalgia, in that it is not necessarily the baby boomers that are remembering and preferring music from their youth (‘60s and ‘70s). Instead, today’s younger generations have decided to investigate the musical archives and to expand their personal knowledge of a rich musical history. The reasons for looking back to the ‘60s and ‘70s involve a desire to move away from



consumer trends, as well as a belief that the music of this time is more authentic, pure, honest, and less manufactured.

Music is rarely able to escape the pressures and trends of the marketplace, for as soon as a niche can be identified it is targeted and becomes quickly saturated. As a result, even nostalgia has become marketed and mass-produced. Trends of retro and kitsch can be identified in music, television, film, clothing, décor, and various other cultural arenas. Films and television programs like *Lords of Dogtown* and *That 70's Show*, as well as the clothing and housewares at "Urban Outfitters" are just a few examples of the infiltration of kitsch and retro into the mainstream. That being said, archival music is somehow able to move beyond the mainstream in most cases.

Because older music is no longer being marketed today as it was at the time of its release, it is perceived as being beyond the clutches of consumerism. This music is then washed clean of its once, perhaps manufactured nature and its original trendiness. A lot of older music also requires that it be personally rediscovered. While some of this music may be found on the radio, in commercials and in film, it is still not readily available for listening and appreciating. Revisiting the music of the '60s and '70s can be like something of a treasure hunt and can involve collecting both the albums themselves, and knowledge about the music. A nostalgic preference for music therefore often involves a great desire to acquire in-depth knowledge of musical history, bands, artists, and albums. Being able to draw lines and connections and to understand music's lineage and heritage is part of this younger generation's nostalgic musical sensibility. The archival knowledge that I have referred to throughout this thesis thus binds and informs peer groups, music and film audiences.

Taste and preference are means to distinguish oneself from the masses and promote the formation of subcultures and communities. Feelings of alienation and uncertainty are associated with youth culture and translate into musical taste, among other preferences. The desire to listen to music that reflects both emotions of angst that are associated with adolescence, and at the same time hope, is a desire for authenticity and honesty. The music found on Top 40 radio, perceptible in programs such as *American Idol* and *Making the Band*, has a manufactured quality, rather than qualities of pure emotion and sentiment. Music on the margins is often able to relieve the disappointment and superficiality of highly produced music. Archival music is one form of peripheral music which might be said to fulfill this function. Thus in the face of mass production, there is group alignment in a shared preference for what is deemed more honest and authentic music, whether indie or retro. This partiality informs strong positioning of likes and dislikes, of what is good and what is bad, further leading to group membership.

In the same way that radio or commercial music has become over-produced and unoriginal, film music has also become formulaic and lacking in innovation. Although compilation soundtracks have created new opportunities and ways to layer film and music, most soundtracks simply remain a mirror of what is on Top 40 radio. Like music listeners, some films have tried to move away from the mainstream and have engaged in a nostalgic turn with their soundtrack and film content. A younger generation of filmmakers, including Wes Anderson, D.V. DeVincentis and Quentin Tarantino, has been distinguishing itself with its use of music and film references and a demonstration of extensive knowledge of older music. To provide further evidence of a move towards

innovative uses of nostalgia in films and on soundtracks, I analyzed *High Fidelity* and *Rushmore*, and found that these films support ideals of nostalgia and archival knowledge of music.

*High Fidelity* is a film about music; about knowledge of music and the importance of music in our lives. Its soundtrack must therefore be representative of these ideas. The film offers opinions and rules about the music and artists that everyone should know: there are certain albums that must be owned, and others that should never be mentioned. There are several moments of musical education in *High Fidelity*, and as the learner becomes the learned, he or she is redeemed. The film instructs that in addition to owning an album, knowledge and anecdotes about the bands and artists are also valuable and must be accurate. And so *High Fidelity* is both educational in its discussions about music and in the music it has selected for its soundtrack. The film's soundtrack, while mostly consisting of '60s and '70s rock, also incorporates some soul as well as songs from a few more contemporary bands. The soundtrack is analogous to the art of the mix tape, which we learn in the film is a delicate art not to be taken lightly. Because *High Fidelity* is so involved in discussions about music and taste, its use and choice of music are original and reflective of the ideals it expounds.

*Rushmore* is a film that is equally entrenched in a dialogue about music. This dialogue does not appear in the film, however, but is instead revealed in the director's choice of songs from British Invasion bands. In addition, the revelation that the film had been scored prior to its being written is further evidence of the importance of music to the director and writers of *Rushmore*. While the film relies on music in several scenes to tell its story in the absence of dialogue, its soundtrack does not involve an abuse

of music or overindulgence therein. These music video moments are appropriate to the film's style and execution and are completely original because of their use of '60s and '70s music. As *Rushmore* is not set in a specified time or place, a general sense of nostalgia infuses the film's characters, dialogue, costumes and music. These elements culminate in the film's final scene with people of all ages dancing in a high school gymnasium while the lyrics of *Ooh La La*: "I wish that I knew what I know now, when I was younger" are heard. The sentiment is wistful and nostalgic and the song's request by a fifteen year-old is evidence of the convolution of the meaning of nostalgia.

Nostalgia has permeated many of today's cultural arenas generating a broad area ripe for study. Music and film are a part of this broad discussion and have generated their own audience and dialogue with nostalgia. The films *Rushmore* and *High Fidelity* are two strong examples of how soundtracks can be original and innovative and how nostalgia can be novel and refreshing. They speak to popular sentiments of boredom, dissatisfaction and disappointment with much of today's cultural products. While *High Fidelity* directly addresses concerns about popular culture through its dialogue and subject matter, *Rushmore* turns away from the commonplace and monotony by creating its own insular world. Both films utilize the soundtrack as a vehicle to differentiate themselves from the masses, in the same way as music subcultures and communities do. These two films' reliance on archival music is reflective of a larger discussion surrounding archival music's superiority to most other music. Both of the films' use of music employs a nostalgia that references the '60s and '70s although the nostalgia is detached from a specific time or place. The music elicits nostalgic feelings rather than distinct memories. *High Fidelity* and *Rushmore* are proof positive that you can feel

nostalgic at any age and always recall a time when things were more simple and pure.

Whether this time is real or imagined, you can be transported there through music... if you know which songs to listen to.

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