

The contrast of 'authentic' rock as compared to 'inauthentic' pop music

Introduction

In this essay I will attempt to discuss the perceived distinction between what is often deemed to be authentic rock music and inauthentic pop music. I will be looking at the influences different artists have on culture, with particular emphasis on their contribution to social change. In discussing this I will be examining what drives different artists to write music from different points of view, and their motivations for and inspirations for their work. As part of this essay I will be making the assumption that particular artists have an image of being either authentic or inauthentic and I will be examining the factors that have created and maintained these images.

Authenticity in popular culture

From the time that Theodor Adorno wrote his scathing criticism of popular music in 1941, the debate about the authenticity of such music has lingered. As Adorno pointed out, "popular music...is usually characterised by its difference from serious music" (Frith & Goodwin (eds) 1990, p. 301). This is the distinction I will be looking at in this essay, although I will describe 'serious' music as that which expresses a social conscience as opposed to that which merely seeks to entertain.

Since its advent, rock or pop music has generally been an expression of the mood of a generation of (mostly) young people. From the turbulent social changes of the 1960s up until today, rock/pop music has been used as a medium through which strong political statements have been made and it has expressed the ups and downs of romantic relationships. It has also at times sought to satirise the prevailing culture through the clever use of irony.

However, much pop music has gained a reputation of not seeking to have an intrinsic form of revolutionary expression but instead has sought to merely entertain and make money for artists and their producers. This approach to music (and art in general) was observed by people like Herbert Marcuse, who, along with Adorno and other members of the Frankfurt School, were struck by the culture industries they observed, of which music was a major part. To Marcuse, art, including music, was the language of revolution.

Instead of being the music of revolution however, much of today's pop music might be seen by someone such as Marcuse as the production of a society that "invalidates art as communication and representation of a world other than that of the Establishment" (Marcuse 1972, p. 54). It could also be said that much pop music "produces for mass consumption and significantly contributes to the determination of that consumption" (Held 1980, p. 91). This is seen in the use of advertising where well-known pop songs are used to appeal to a certain market to sell a product.

From the above discussion, it can generally be observed then that "at certain historical moments in different societies pop or rock culture as a whole has stood against a society that demands conform, while at other moments, only sub-strata of popular music have done so" (Lee).

In general terms, 'real' or authentic rock 'n' roll has been seen to be that which is not manufactured and which expresses a social conscience. It is also seen to be intelligent and inspirational for its listeners, moving many people to strive for positive changes to their world. Examples of artists with such reputations are groups like U2 and Midnight Oil and solo performers such as Bruce Springsteen and John Mellencamp. On the other hand, 'shallow' or inauthentic pop music has been seen to be mass-produced music that is simple to manufacture and has shallow lyrics, generally along the lines of the 'boy meets girl' approach. Much dance music has such a reputation. Artists who have been placed in this category include Kylie Minogue, Britney Spears, Spice Girls and the recent 'Popstars' phenomenon in Australia that produced Bardot and Scandal'us. There are many other artists who could be placed in the categories of either authentic or inauthentic. However for the purposes of this essay, it is the aforementioned artists on whom I will be placing particular emphasis.

As can be seen from the above discussion, any definition of what constitutes authenticity or inauthenticity in rock/pop music is open to criticism. For the purposes of this essay, I will define authentic music as mentioned above ie. that which seeks to proclaim a social conscience and which inspires people to strive for social change. I will define inauthentic music as that which seeks merely to entertain and to make money, as well as being music that is simple to produce. In creating these definitions, it is understood that many people will place particular artists in a different category than I myself might. This only serves to highlight the problem of authenticity and the importance of backing up a definition with evidence.

The problem of authenticity

Mention of the band Milli Vanilli would not conjure up images of authenticity in the minds of many people in describing this pop duo from the early 1990s. If it does, it is in the sense that they were thought of as being so far removed from being authentic as does not warrant serious discussion. However, the fact that this band, who “had their [American music industry ‘Best New Artist’] prize revoked for misrepresenting their contributions to their own music” (Friedman, November 1993) have been described as being a scapegoat for the image of inauthenticity is a reflection of how difficult is a discussion of what is considered to be authentic or inauthentic pop music in today’s world. One writer, who believes that this band have become scapegoats for inauthentic pop, makes the point that

“while most viewers recognize the complex division of labor in moviemaking--nobody gets upset that actors don't do their own stunts--pop music hangs on to the folk-era image of the individual artist communicating directly to her or his listeners. Milli Vanilli became martyrs to this myth of authenticity. They were the recording industry's sacrifice meant to prove the integrity of the rest of their product--as if the music marketed under the names U2 or Janet Jackson weren't every bit as constructed and mediated, just because the voices on the records matched the faces in the videos” (Friedman, November 1993).

To use some Australian examples, many people would consider the music of Kylie Minogue to be just as authentic as that of Midnight Oil in that the music of both achieves its aims and the images of both are contrived to a certain extent. It is worthy of note that, at the closing ceremony of the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney, it was arguably both Minogue and Midnight Oil whose performances are best remembered, Minogue for her thoroughly entertaining rendition of *On a Night Like This* and Midnight Oil for their performance of *Beds are Burning* while wearing their ‘Sorry’ t-shirts, promoting their stance on the issue of an apology to the ‘stolen generations’ of Australian Aboriginals. The issue of authenticity arises here in that it could be argued that both Minogue and Midnight Oil were authentic in their performances by being true to whom they are as rock/pop artists.

Kylie Minogue and Stock, Aitken & Waterman

The question of authenticity has been an issue for Kylie Minogue almost from the beginning of her singing career. Her 1988 album *Kylie* (her first album) was manufactured by the producers Stock, Aitken and Waterman, who were at one time “the most successful production team in Britain” (Goodyer, 1987).

Up until the release of *Kylie*, Minogue had been known for her role in the Australian soap opera *Neighbours*. Her popularity in this role, along with her best selling cover of the song ‘Locomotion’, enabled her to be signed by the Stock, Aitken and Waterman (S/A/W) trio. After letting her into their studio, the trio wrote what was to be Minogue’s big selling hit from the *Kylie* album, *I Should Be So Lucky*. In producing this song, which was “their comment on her pop-star aspirations” (Hyde, 1999), the trio “quickly thought of a bass line and a few suitable chords...[and] two hours later Minogue was back on the plane to Australia” (Hyde, 1999). The song eventually reached the top of the charts, where it “remained...for five weeks, sold over 810,000 copies and became the only song in chart history to be number one in the UK and Australia simultaneously” (Hyde, 1999).

Many people say that this and the subsequent success of artists such as Kylie Minogue is mainly or even totally due to the production skills of producers like Stock, Aitken and Waterman. S/A/W would not deny this either, claiming that they could give listeners “exactly what they wanted” (Bernard, 1986). However, “despite their commercial popularity, they have never been taken seriously by popular music critics who accuse them of forcing chart music into a rut, with songs that all sound the same” (Hyde, 1999). The remark has even been made that “Kylie hasn’t so much had 17 consecutive Top 20 hit singles, she has had virtually the same hit 17 times” (Shuker 1994, p. 165).

Criticism of the authenticity of Minogue has also come from people outside the music industry. The focus of this criticism is again her perceived lack of talent and the idea that her success is mainly due to the clever marketing of her managers. Neil Shoebridge, writing in *Business Review Weekly*, has commented that the success of Minogue is seen to be a “triumph of style over substance” (Shoebridge 1998, p. 106), probably the most common grounds for debate over the issue of authenticity in rock/pop music. Minogue is also described as proof that “marketing can turn an ordinary person into a star” (Shoebridge 1998, p. 106). Shoebridge goes on to say that the cleverness of Minogue’s marketing is described in the idea that “regardless of how her latest album or single is selling, [she] is always marketed as a star, to the point where her ‘pop princess’ status becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy” (Shoebridge 1998, p. 106).

From both inside and outside the music industry, Kylie Minogue is seen to be inauthentic by a wide range of critics. As mentioned previously, a major factor in the creation of this image is the clever marketing that goes on behind the scenes to create and maintain the image of a pop star. While it is true that any artist benefits from clever marketing, artists such as Minogue are seen to be aided to the extent that their marketing covers over any deficiencies in the artist’s talent and ability, perceived or otherwise. As well as marketing, another factor in the maintenance of a ‘pop-star’ image that can be seen to make the star inauthentic is the timing in which the star’s music is released. The release of Minogue’s single *I Should Be So Lucky* in the UK was timed to be “within weeks of the Australian soap opera

Neighbours (of which Minogue was the leading star) being aired on prime-time television” (Hyde, 1999). The success of one was a catalyst for the success of the other. As well as this, “there was no other female pop star at the time who would appeal to Stock, Aitken and Waterman’s target markets of pre-adolescents and gay men” (Hyde, 1999). The timing of the release of the single was a major factor in its success.

By writing and producing the songs for Minogue’s album *Kylie*, and releasing them at the most opportune time, the case for labelling an artist such as Kylie Minogue as inauthentic becomes strong indeed.

It is interesting to note that, towards the end of Minogue’s time with S/A/W, they “acknowledged her stature by actually allowing her to develop as a singer and artist” (Hyde, 1999). The image of a pop star not developing as an artist, whether by their own doing or as a result of the control of others, only accentuates the image of inauthenticity in the minds of many music critics. However, “during the last two years with PWL Records [Waterman’s own company]” (Hyde, 1999) when Minogue was perhaps becoming more authentic, “her image changed. Her music became more R&B flavoured, and her image was more raunchy” (Hyde, 1999). This move to become more authentic however, “gave Minogue less success than she was used to” (Hyde, 1999). This highlights the idea that Minogue’s success was only due to the genius of her marketing, thus further justifying criticism in the minds of many about her lack of ability and real authenticity as an artist.

Music as message – Midnight Oil

Considered to be at the other end of the spectrum to Kylie Minogue in terms of authenticity, the music of Midnight Oil has inspired many people to strive for positive change in the areas of environmentalism and social justice. The mention of Midnight Oil has almost been synonymous with political activism and, as a result, authenticity, throughout their (approximately) 25-year career. The respected music magazine *Rolling Stone* opens its biography about the band by stating that they are “known almost as much for their political activism as their music” (Midnight Oil Biography 2001), and by having “consistently dealt with issues of oppression, poverty and the environment...[have] pushed rock music to a new level of awareness” (Midnight Oil Biography 2001).

From their beginnings in the late 1970s, Midnight Oil “played a variety of benefit shows for political causes including anti-uranium mining, Save the Whales and Greenpeace” (Midnight Oil Biography). Their 1982 album “10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, a rallying against the escalating arms race” (Midnight Oil Biography), widened their involvement in and writing about social issues. Two years later, in 1984, Garrett ran for the Senate for the Nuclear Disarmament Party and was narrowly defeated (Midnight Oil Biography). The band’s involvement then moved to more local issues with a focus on the plight of Australian Aboriginals with the release of *Diesel and Dust*. Following their focus on Aboriginal Australians, the band then devoted their time to corporate excess with the 1990 release of *Blue Sky Mining*. Shortly after the release of the album the band “performed a concert outside of the Manhattan offices of Exxon, protesting the oil spill in Alaska” (Midnight Oil Biography).

Midnight Oil’s continued passion and raising of social issues is a major reason for their image as an authentic rock band. Added to this is their own particular style of music and the fact that they continue to play not only to large audiences in massive arenas, but also to suburban pubs and, as mentioned previously, to outback Australia as well. In discussing reasons for their image of authenticity, Garrett explains, “we [have] stayed as Australian based musicians connected to our audience and their communities” (Ray 1998, p. 11).

As previously mentioned, the latest and perhaps most well known of Midnight Oil’s political statements was their wearing of the ‘Sorry’ t-shirts when they played *Beds are Burning* at the closing ceremony of the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney. The next day, Peter Garret stated that if the band had not taken the opportunity to perform this gesture to a worldwide audience, they would have betrayed their identity as a band and what they stood for. Another reason they gave for their statement was that, for the band, “one of themes of the whole of the Olympics has been the Aboriginality of Australia. It was a theme that was most highly focused when Cathy [Freeman] won the 400 metres and carried the two flags” (Dennis, 2000).

While Midnight Oil have, through “the issues threaded through the lyrics...combined with Peter [Garrett’s] unmistakable personal style...create[d] an Australian musical entity that has consistently attracted popular and critical acclaim” (Habitat Australia article on Garrett), they have also received their fair share of criticism. *Rolling Stone* has even offered what some might interpret as a critique of their authenticity by stating that the 1993 *Earth and Sun and Moon* album “saw the Oils shift away from studio wizardry and focus on “real instruments” and live recording” (Midnight Oil Biography). While probably not intended as a statement that the band’s focus before this album was inauthentic, it is interesting that such a popular and respected music magazine would make such a comment.

Criticism of Midnight Oil has also come from the highest levels of politics in Australia, with the Prime Minister, John Howard, stating that, by wearing the ‘Sorry’ t-shirts at the closing ceremony of the Olympic Games, the band was politicising what should have been a celebration of Australian culture. This criticism however, in my opinion, only adds to the image of authenticity that Midnight Oil has carried since their beginnings many years ago.

Garage band millionaires – the continuing struggle of authenticity for U2

Perhaps the most famous example in the world of authentic rock music is that of Irish band U2. Since their beginnings they have inspired and given hope to countless people through their rousing anthems and exposure of the worst injustices and, in the 1990s, the megalomania of the pop star world. Since their change of image in the early 1990s they have also lost much of their following, as people became disillusioned with their apparent 'selling out' to their own fame and rejection of strongly held opinions. As will be discussed shortly however, this change of image was a response to their own struggle with authenticity.

From their early days, "fostering an image of honesty and sincerity, U2's songs like *I Will Follow* and *Bad* established a sound which was genuine, simple and straight-forward while songs like *Sunday Bloody Sunday* and *New Year's Day* displayed their persistent political commitment" (Dolinar, 1996).

The image of authenticity that has become synonymous with U2 was "perhaps best encapsulated on *The Joshua Tree*" (Dolinar, 1996). The photographs of the band on the cover and inside the album show them "in the barren deserts of Southern California among the sagebrush and sand...[and] dressed in nondescript attire exhibiting a solemn and pensive countenance" (Dolinar, 1996). Throughout this period "this image of simplicity and sincerity remained the same, staying true to their well-established following" (Dolinar, 1996) and providing a stark contrast to what was considered to be a lot of mediocre pop music of the 1980s.

However the fact that U2 struggled with their own image of authenticity during these years, despite their passionate performances and their solidarity with many struggling people in the world, is testament to their own integrity and, in my mind, confirms their authenticity.

This struggle was made apparent to the band during the making of *The Joshua Tree*. During this time

"it became apparent that sustaining this countenance of authenticity was itself a fabrication. The calculated construction of appearances was obvious in the staging of the photography [mentioned earlier] for *The Joshua Tree*. Shot in -20 degree weather, the band's lack of expression is not so much a display of their introspection but of their lack of motivation as they stood in the freezing cold" (Dolinar, 1996).

It had become obvious to the band that their image of authenticity was itself inauthentic.

As the band became more popular with the success of *The Joshua Tree* and the subsequent release of *Rattle and Hum*, their popularity became "difficult to reconcile" (Dolinar, 1996) with their image of an authentic band trying to remain outside the mainstream of popular music. In a strange twist of irony, the "more they rebelled [from the mainstream], the more popular they became" (Dolinar, 1996). This is an interesting observation on the plight of popular music at the time and is perhaps a reflection of the disenchantment that many people felt with the mass-produced pop that was coming from performers such as Kylie Minogue and many other pop performers in the 1980s.

U2's struggle with their own image of authenticity, in particular the "contradiction in being garage band millionaires" (Dolinar, 1996), gave rise to their dramatic change of image in the early 1990s with the release of *Achtung Baby* and the subsequent *Zoo TV* tour.

In general terms, the band's change of image was about "recognising the futility in resisting absorption into the popular mainstream...[and] assuming the image [of rock superstars] thrust upon them" (Dolinar, 1996). In an apparent blurring of what is authentic and inauthentic, a characteristic of the postmodern condition, U2, by "mimicking and mocking, imitating and exaggerating...make the transition from the modern into the postmodern" (Dolinar, 1996). Instead of continually trying to project an image of their own authenticity onto the world, they chose to instead "embrace technology, the media and rock superstardom [and use] repetition and parody to deconstruct their image" (Dolinar, 1996). The *Zoo TV* tour, conveying this whole new image of the band, became "a pantomime of farce; a mocking extravaganza of absurdity "impudently sending up technology and the video age," turning their silver suits and shades into self-mockery and the blaspheming of the pop star world" (Smith, 1993).

The creativity and courage that it took to change their image at the height of their popularity is a characteristic of the authenticity of other great bands of the past, most notably *The Beatles* with their *Sergeant Pepper* album in the late 1960s.

Even the media itself misunderstood the band's change of image. The "tabloids [began] circulating stories of Bono's supposed egomania" (Dolinar, 1996). Criticism came too from Christian circles, as three of the band members had for years been known for their strong Christian convictions. The appearance of Bono in devils horns on stage during the *Zoo TV* concerts, acting out the MacPhisto character, caused many of their Christian fans to dismiss the band as having lost their way. This loss of support in the Christian community caused a strong defense of the band to be written

by the Reverend John Smith, an Australian minister who has remained close to the band and is well aware of their motivations. Writing about U2 in 1993, Smith made the comment that “the Bono et al of 1993 on stage are both authentic and utterly misleading as to the genuine passion, faith and even humility of the private personae” (Smith, 1993). It is indeed ironic and disappointing that so many perceived experts, both within and outside the music industry, have so quickly discarded U2 as becoming just another inauthentic band who joined the masses of shallow pop artists in the rock/pop world.

It is important to also note that, for U2, throughout the *Zoo TV* years, “while [their] image [was] one of glitz and cynicism, their involvement with charity benefits has endured” (Dolinar, 1996). This is an important point to note because, all along, the band has been trying to make the same statements as they always have, yet from a different point of view. For U2, regardless of their image, “the inextinguishable fire of protest burns on” (Smith, 1993).

Since the *Zoo TV* days, U2 have made somewhat of a return to their past sound and image with the release of *All That You Can't Leave Behind*. However, while this album is heralded as a return to the more serious side of U2, it also has its critics who talk about its lack of depth. I believe that some of the criticism of this album suffers from the same lack of understanding and demand for authenticity that characterised critics of the *Zoo TV* tour. In seeing this album as a mild return to U2's early years, one critic suffers from the inevitable temptation to compare the current album to earlier ones by saying that “certainly, nothing on this album conveys the magnitude of social criticism found in *Sunday Bloody Sunday* or *Acrobat*, but the album also fails to produce a break-out feel-good hit. There's no *Mysterious Ways* to carry it above most of the recent teen fluff” (Menchik, 21 November 2000). It seems that with a band such as U2, people's insatiable demand for them to still be the ‘shining light’ of authenticity in a world of so much inauthenticity in pop music, places on them an intolerable burden which they are simply unable (and unwilling) to carry.

Other critics however have seen their continued authenticity in the new album. To me, as with other critics, “passion, belief, struggle, and determined, hard-won optimism—all the things that make for great grown-up music—are in abundance” (Burge, January 2001) on this album.

For U2, the struggle for authenticity remains strong as they continually strive to be the best that they can be as rock and roll artists.

Geri Halliwell and the United Nations

Following on from the struggle to be true to who they are as performing artists, Geri Halliwell, formerly of the Spice Girls, has attempted to change her image from inauthentic to authentic in that she has been “recruited by the United Nations as a goodwill ambassador” (UN Role for the Artist Formerly Known as Ginger, 1998). Halliwell is another artist whose change of image has brought with it different opinions about her authenticity. While with the Spice Girls, her image and the image of that group were, as with Kylie Minogue, simply as entertainers who were out to give a ‘feel good’ element to their music. The music of the Spice Girls is music that is easy to dance to and does not require the listener to think deeply about issues of the world. Thus it is seen by many as being yet another example of inauthentic, shallow pop music.

That Halliwell has left the group of her own volition and has since been appointed as a United Nations ambassador has given her increased respect in the eyes of many, including “Alex Marshall, the UN population fund's deputy director for information, [who] said: “She will be a great ambassador for young people.”” (UN Role for the Artist Formerly Known as Ginger, 1998). Despite this however, it seems that the image of being ‘just’ a pop star will take a long time to disappear and for her to be taken seriously as a UN representative will take a lot of hard work. This was evidenced at a press conference shortly after she accepted the UN role, where her “presence at the United Nations... created a fever-pitch interest among diplomats and U.N. staff members, who attempted to enter the news conference reserved for journalists in order to get a glimpse of the star” (Ginger Spice Pledges to use Fame for Feminism, 1998). It seems that, despite apparent good intentions, the pop star image is still one that many of us, including UN diplomats, still have a craving to see.

Young pop sensation – Britney Spears

Another example of a pop star who is seen as simply an entertainer is Britney Spears. Young and good looking, Spears fits the image of the 21st century pop star, especially with her early hit, *Baby One More Time*. However, countering the image of inauthenticity that this projects in the minds of many people, Spears herself is proud of the fact that she is trying to be just herself. This certainly seems true if one takes the word of her interviewers. Since the *Baby One More Time* hit, “Britney has alternated between doe-eyed ingenue and midriff-baring sexpot” (Eliscu, September 13, 2001) and as she comes across, “Britney and her image are one and the same - she is as much of a delightful contradiction as she seems” (Eliscu, September 13, 2001).

So where does this leave the question of authenticity with someone like Spears? Certainly many people would want to place her into the category of inauthentic pop star and would not dream of comparing her with a band like U2. However, Spears does say that being real is important to her. She admires actress Susan Sarandon “because she

"has a realness about her." (Eliscu, September 13, 2001). Spears also openly says that she abhors "fake people" (Eliscu, September 13, 2001). An important revelation in Spears' life has been that she has "learned that it doesn't matter what other people think of you. You just . . . be" (Eliscu, September 13, 2001). She also says, "all I can do is be who I am and hope people like that" (Eliscu, September 13, 2001). While statements like these, especially from one so young, seem to project a level of maturity, in the pop world, Spears is still not seen to be genuine to many people as she is no different to other pop artists in that she still purely produces music that is easy to dance to and does not bring to light social issues of major significance to the world at large.

The Australian 'Popstars' phenomenon – Bardot and Scandal'us

The recent Australian 'Popstars' phenomenon is also seen to be inauthentic by many people, apart from the teen market to whom the groups Bardot and Scandal'us are aimed. Arising out of a nationwide search for music talent that was seen by thousands of people on national television, both Bardot and Scandal'us have, at least initially, been very successful with their early hits. However the claim of inauthenticity with these groups is strong, with the same production style being used for them as was used for Kylie Minogue in her early years. In other words, their songs are written for them, and their on-stage image and dance routine is carefully choreographed, often to the point where it is predictable and boring to many people. While the Scandal'us website states that the sound of the group is "a sound of their own that would display a uniquely Australian flavour of pop/R&B" (Scandal'us, 2001), it is still not the sound of the group itself but that of their producers and marketing staff. At the same time however, it is undeniable from watching their performances on television that the members of Bardot and Scandal'us do have talent – they know how to dance and they have good singing voices.

It is also undeniable however that the success of both groups, as with that of Minogue, is largely the result of clever marketing. In having their selection and the auditions of thousands of aspiring stars played out on national prime-time television, these people are living out the dreams of thousands of teenagers throughout the country.

Bruce Springsteen – authentic or inauthentic?

As with U2 and Midnight Oil, the mention of Bruce Springsteen has become synonymous with an image of authenticity. His songs have the reputation of relating with the struggle of the American working class and offer a sense of hope to thousands of fans.

At the same time however, Springsteen, just like U2, has become so successful that the image of integrity and authenticity that he tries so hard to project is difficult to reconcile with his enormous success. In the mid-1980s, the release of *Bruce Springsteen and the E-Street Band Live* was an event not to be missed and its popularity furthered its own sales. It became "a commodity which sold more and more because it had sold so well already" (Frith 1988, p. 95).

With Springsteen the question arises again as to what constitutes authenticity in a performing artist. The image that is generally agreed upon by critics about Springsteen is "not that [he] is authentic in a direct way – is simply expressing himself – but that he represents 'authenticity'...he stands for the core values of rock and roll even as those values become harder and harder to sustain" (Frith 1988, p. 97). Once again, the postmodern world we live in throws up the questions of, firstly, what it means to be authentic and secondly, whether or not it even matters if an artist is authentic, as long as they appear authentic and represent authenticity. Springsteen certainly does the latter, at least to his loyal band of followers.

Springsteen's authentic image is displayed via his on-stage appearance in simple clothing and not the "elaborate spectacle of cabaret pop and soul" (Frith 1988, p. 98) that U2 have so brilliantly sent up. Another way in which his authenticity is displayed is through his lyrics, which, despite the fact that he may not necessarily have experienced the struggles that he writes about, focus on "the working class...the effects of weakness and crime...the murky reality of the American dream; they contrast utopian impulses with people's lack of opportunity to do much more than get by" (Frith 1988, p. 98).

Another appeal about Springsteen and his authenticity is the fact that his performances display a passion and energy that is rare among other artists. He always works feverishly hard at what he does to produce the best live show he can for his audience. Springsteen

"has regularly stated in interviews over his entire career that he feels he owes his fans every ounce of his energy and ability, every time he hits the stage. This might also explain why, even after Bruce made the *Forbes* list of highest-paid entertainers, his fans 'believed' in Bruce's solidarity with the working-class: he might be making \$40 million a year, but he worked his butt off for that \$40 million" (Sartelle & Rubio, November 1993).

Despite this image of authenticity however, Springsteen has, along with other artists with the same image, had his share of criticism. A prime example of this is his mid-1980s hit *Born in the USA*. This song, meant as a "bitter reflection on how America has abused and neglected its Vietnam veterans" (Sartelle & Rubio, November 1993), was completely mis-interpreted by "much of the public as a Reaganesque national anthem of born-again patriotism" (Sartelle & Rubio,

November 1993).

The *Born in the USA* album also drew criticism from some in the rock industry for its apparent portrayal of rampant nationalism which features “the American flag on the cover with Bruce in front:... red, white, and blue- jeans. And then there's Springsteen himself, clean-shaven and newly experienced with Nautilus equipment. Gone is the scruffy and scrawny street poet, replaced by a wholesome, buff and all-American Bruce” (Sartelle & Rubio, November 1993). The song, *Dancing in the Dark*, also from the *Born in the USA* album, “only reinforced the conservative implications of the packaging: Springsteen, who had hitherto made only 'artistic' videos in which he did not himself appear, was now being offered up as teen idol and fantasy heart-throb” (Sartelle & Rubio, November 1993).

However, despite the criticism, Bruce Springsteen remains to thousands of music fans around the world, the quintessential authentic rock artist. Even though his appearances may have an air of inauthenticity about them resulting from the fact that he is a multi-millionaire who merely sings about the struggles of 'ordinary' people, “his belief...in the in the liberating possibilities of rock and roll...is authentic” (Sartelle & Rubio, November 1993) and it is for this reason that he can still be regarded as a genuine authentic rock artist in a world of so much inauthenticity.

Another champion of the working class – John Mellencamp

John Mellencamp is another rock artist who, in the mould of Bruce Springsteen, has established himself as an authentic singer and performer. When Mellencamp recently received the 2001 Billboard Century Award “*Billboard* Editor and Chief Timothy White said, “This is rock music that tells the truth on both its composer and the culture he's observing”” (Mellencamp Gets Century, 2001). Mellencamp has always been an artist who has been “forging his own path” (John Mellencamp Biography, 2001). In the 1980s, his work sought to highlight the struggles of the working class. He “continued to develop his social conscience for his 1985 release, *Scarecrow*” (John Mellencamp Biography, 2001) and then “progressed from observer to advocate, organizing the American farmer benefit Farm Aid with Willie Nelson and Neil Young. Mellencamp also refused corporate sponsorship for his tours, preferring to distance himself from big business” (John Mellencamp Biography, 2001).

Another reason Mellencamp's authentic image is because of his

“esteem of the black and white socio-musical traditions that merged in rock. All of Mellencamp's important bands have been integrated, and all his finest recordings have openly acknowledged the meld of gospel/blues/R&B strains with European-derived song lines, band forms, and parlor ballads; this mix is the crucible of the American musical experience” (Mellencamp Gets Century, 2001).

Mellencamp is one artist that draws on his earthy roots. Describing these roots, he recently made the comment “the music that I enjoyed and grew up listening to, came from the street, from the gutter” (Mellencamp Gets Century, 2001). His songs and his style depict this image strongly.

A common characteristic of many artists who have an image of authenticity is their work on behalf of struggling people. U2 have continuously demonstrated it with their involvement in Amnesty International and Greenpeace, and Bono's recent widely publicised work on behalf of the Jubilee campaign to relieve third world debt. Bruce Springsteen has often promoted local causes in the towns where he has been performing, and Peter Garrett of Midnight Oil is currently President of the Australian Conservation Foundation.

Conclusion

In this essay I have highlighted, using the examples of a number of bands and solo performers, that the discussion of what is authentic or inauthentic in popular music today raises some problems. Authenticity is often determined by one's interpretation and is fuelled by different tastes in musical style as well as different influences. I have attempted to put forward that authenticity in a rock artist is determined by a depth in their music that comes from the heart and seeks to encourage and inspire people to strive to affect positive social change.

Popular music throughout the ages has inspired the masses and given joy and hope to millions of people throughout the world. Regardless of motivation and whether it be considered authentic or inauthentic, rock/pop artists continue to provide us with moments of ecstasy and inspiration that transport us to a world where all is well and that inspire us to do our part to make that the reality in the current world we live in.

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