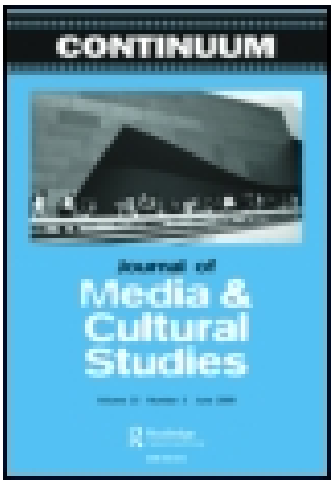

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Whiter Rock: the 'Australian sound' and the beat boom

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Philip Hayward's edited collection, *From Pop to Punk to Postmodernism*, published in 1992, was a watershed in the academic discussion of popular music in Australia. Looking back on it now though, it is a work deeply scarred by cultural cringe. Its dominant theoretical position is that Australian rock music is derivative and imitative. Graeme Turner takes this position with his usual clarity. He writes that: 'To look for "the Australian" element [in popular music] is to look for a local inflection, the distinctive modification of an already internationally established musical style' (Turner, 1992, p. 13). He goes on: 'The American and British dominance of popular musical styles and of the retail music market has been so comprehensive that one cannot really locate an indigenous musical style either in the mainstream or in the "alternative" fringe of the Australian rock and pop industry' (Turner, 1992, p. 13). Turner writes that what he '*won't* pursue … is the hunt for a local sound—the audio equivalent of the "Australian look" in film' (Turner, 1992, p. 13). This, he explains, 'is a compromised concept' in film and 'in music it is simply untenable'.[1] The exception in the book is Vikki Riley's chapter on punk rock in Melbourne where she spends some time arguing the reverse, that Australian punk rock was not derivative of the English version, though influenced by it, and that it needs to be understood within the Australian cultural context—even though she uses the subtitle 'The British invent a movement—the colony responds' (Riley, 1992, p. 113).

More recently Tara Brabazon has asked: 'What does it mean for a track of music to sound Australian?' (Brabazon, 2000). However, while arguing that: 'There is a proliferation of local styles that mould, critique and question Anglo-American popular music genres' (Brabazon, 2000), she suggests that these styles get incorporated into the globalised music industry and that, in the end, 'the failure to integrate Western styles with indigenous rhythm indicates that the style of Australian music is essentially derivative of American and European modes' (Brabazon, 2000). In this argument, only the integration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander musics into Australian popular music would guarantee an Australian sound. Denying the existence of a national sound, Brabazon asks: 'What does Englishness sound like?' and, answering that it doesn't, that there is no English sound, writes that: 'Blur probably has more in common with [New Zealand band] Straightjacket Fits than Split Enz' (Brabazon, 2000, p. 106). What Brabazon means here is that Blur have more in common with Straightjacket Fits than that band has with Split Enz. Brabazon's example is an unfortunate choice. Blur are a part of a very English lineage that includes The Beatles, The Kinks, and The Smiths

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which, in its most recent, nostalgic incarnation, is known as Britpop [on Britpop and its antecedents see Zuberi (2001), esp. Chapter 1 'The last truly British people you will ever know: The Smiths, Morrissey, and Britpop'; also Hesmondhalgh (2001)]. Moreover, like these other bands, Blur's Englishness resides not only in their lyrics, CD covers and the like, but in their sonic evocation of a white English musical tradition, a tradition not founded in rural folk music but in the commercial popular music of the music hall.[2]

Certainly it is the case that popular music is a globalised, international industry, and has become more and more so since the early days of rock'n'roll in the 1950s (Taylor, 1997). Nevertheless, much popular music is produced and consumed locally, and under local cultural conditions. Culture is an active process. As John Fiske noted: 'Culture is the constant process of producing meanings of and from our social experience' (Fiske, 1989, p. 1). Many reasons are given as to why The Easybeats only had one hit in England, 'Friday on My Mind', and why bands like The Twilights and Masters Apprentices failed miserably outside of Australia. This general failure is put down to a lack of professionalism, lack of skills as compared to English and American bands, bad management, lack of contacts and so on. While many of these may have played a part, I want to suggest the importance of a cultural argument. Contrary to Turner and Brabazon, I think there is an Australian sound, a sound which has developed since at least the time of Billy Thorpe and the Aztecs' early hits and which continues through the pub rock bands of the 1980s, such as Cold Chisel and The Angels, is to be found in Midnight Oil, and can still be recognised in bands as varied as Regurgitator and Grinspoon [on pub rock and the Australian music sensibility see Stratton (2004)].[3] This sound has evolved in and through Australian culture. It is demonstrated in the unquestionable popularity of these bands in Australia and their limited success, with the honourable exception of AC/DC, outside of Australia.[4]

What I will argue is that, sonically, these bands 'make sense' to Australian audiences, that their music works within a repertoire of sounds which articulate with the dominant musical sensibility in Australian culture.[5] To put it simply, where the Beat Boom in England was greatly influenced by African-American music, in Australia the local beat bands were influenced more by English groups. While there obviously was cultural influence, nothing is gained in the understanding of Australian popular music by talking simply in terms of derivation and imitation. We need to clarify how beat music was transformed to make sense within the Australian popular music sensibility. Through the formative years of Australian rock's development, let us say from 1963 when Billy Thorpe and the Aztecs came together to Cold Chisel's success in the late 1970s and early 1980s, African-American music, its rhythms and vocal patterns, was little heard in Australia outside of particular subcultural groups—the kind of groups that gave rise to, and supported, Lobby Loyde's music, for example. African-American music certainly had much less presence in the Australian music charts than in the British charts.

During the Second World War both American black and white troops were stationed in Australia (Hammond Moore, 1981). Between them they helped to popularise to Australian audiences a more emotionally intense music, swing, and dance, the jitterbug, both derived from African-American origins [on the influence of the American troops on jazz in Australia see Bisset (1979), Chapter 5 'Aussies on parade']. However, after the war there was pressure to return to what were thought of as the more respectable forms of music and dance of the pre-war period. For example, in most venues swing jazz was replaced by slower rhythms more suitable for ballroom dancing. There was even a quite successful attempt to popularise square dancing (Stratton, 1992, pp. 92–93). These shifts can be read as part of the reassertion of a middle-class value system which privileged

reason over emotion and associated emotional excess with working class, and black, immorality. Stella Lees has described the Australian context into which rock'n'roll was introduced:

> With the advent of rock'n'roll, the custodians of youth stepped up the campaign against the new influences. Morality as well as cultural values were at stake. … More than other pop music, rock'n'roll was criticised for appealing to that most basic drive, sex. Although companies had stripped away much of the sexual and violent images of the original black music from which rock'n'roll came, observers still felt that sex was too evident (Lees, 1987, pp. 127–129).

What was relatively acceptable for a white audience in the United States was not acceptable in an Australia which, as far as possible, continued to look to middle-class England for its culture. The consequence is that the Australian rock tradition has been sonically much more closely allied to white, English popular music; to put it another way, the influence of African, in particular African-American musical aesthetics has been much less than in the United States and less than in England. Even the American rockers who became popular in Australia in the late 1950s tended to come from the whiter, more country end of the American rock'n'roll spectrum. However the importance of the English popular music tradition in Australia does not mean that Australian rock should be popular in England. The Britpop tradition is essentially inward-looking and works off, among other things, a very culturally English repertoire of sensibilities including sentimentality, tits'n'bums humour, and a nostalgic assertion of an English working-class life-style (think, for example, of The Kinks' 'Waterloo Sunset', 'Lola' and 'Dead End Street'), all operating in a lineage that stretches back to early twentieth-century music hall. The melodic form of much of this music, with its emphasis on anthemic structure (Queen's 'We Will Rock You', Oasis' 'Wonderwall') and sing-a-long choruses (The Beatles' 'Maxwell's Silver Hammer') also derives from this source.

The Cultural Cringe and the Ideology of Imitation

All of the above needs a lot of unpacking and I want to start by discussing briefly the ideas of derivation and imitation. As a historically white settler colony, Australians have always had a sense of their cultural inferiority, most obviously to British, in particular English, culture. This assumption of inferiority has been played out most importantly in the idea of the cultural cringe, that Australian culture is a pale imitation of English culture and that an Australian artist's worth must be measured by their success in England, or more recently the United States, rather than in Australia.[6] As we have seen in Brabazon's argument, this colonialist ideology is still central to discussions of Australian popular music. Craig McGregor, in his contribution to *From Pop to Punk to Postmodernism*, is very up-front in his use of the derivation trope. After all, as a successful ideology, its hegemonic force lies in its apparently obvious truth. Writing about Australian rock music of the late 1950s and early 1960s, McGregor states that:

> that whole early Australian rock scene seemed out of place. Displaced. Everyone knew they were just imitating the American rock'n'roll stars. …
>
> Looking back, I see it as a time of inevitable imitation. The local singers and musicians paid homage to their mentors with the sincerest form of flattery. They wrote some songs of their own but the local content/reference was

> minimal; it was 'international' material bereft of much Australian content (McGregor, 1992, p. 91).

McGregor goes on to mention The Easybeats, Billy Thorpe and The Aztecs and others and then remarks that, 'in terms of *activity* Australia had developed its own rock culture but it was, like so much other Australian culture, highly derivative' (McGregor, 1992, p. 91). Here we find the argument in its full form: Australian culture is derivative and Australian rock music, being an aspect of a derivative culture is, itself, nothing but derivative. Such a claim not only diminishes the work of, in this case, Australian popular musicians but ignores the productivity and specificity of Australian culture; its ability to appropriate and rework elements from elsewhere within the Australian cultural order. Whereas in English work on popular music, from Simon Frith's *Sound Effects* through Iain Chambers' *Urban Rhythms* to Nabeel Zuberi's *Sounds English*, there is an unquestioned recognition of the specificity of the English rock tradition while acknowledging the importance of American origins and influences, in Australia discussion of Australian popular music has been asphyxiated by the dominance of colonialist ideology.

We must, then, appreciate the ideological difference between using terms such as derivation and imitation, and those such as influence. We must also recognise that there *is* an Australian sound born out of the particularity of Australian culture—however we wish to define that discursive construct 'Australia'—and that there was a popular music tradition of significant complexity in Australia before the outside influences of rock'n'roll and its associated musical forms. Rock'n'roll, and subsequent importations such as the beat sound and rap, have been incorporated into Australian culture through the sensibility expressed in Australian popular music.

Graeme Smith has noted the establishment in 1955 of the Victorian Folklore Society by Wendy Lowenstein and Ian Turner (Smith, 1985, p. 479). Smith argues that this marked the beginning of a reconceptualisation and a new acknowledgement of the Australian bush ballad tradition [for an earlier discussion of the Australian folk revival movement see Manifold (1964), Chapter VII]. Furthermore, as Smith writes elsewhere:

> Australian country music emerged in the 1930s and 1940s as Australian singers produced local versions of American performers like Jimmie Rodgers, the Carter family, and the singing cowboys Hank Snow and Wilf Carter. It was the first Australian popular music genre to use a localised, national form of address to a mass-mediated audience, and as such sees itself as having a particularly strong claim to be Australia's authentic music (Smith and Brelt, 1998, p. 11).

Clinton Walker accurately remarks that at a time, 'when Jim Reeves, Hank Williams, and Patsy Cline were redefining hillbilly music as a pop form, [in] Australia Buddy Williams and Slim Dusty led a similar charge for the bush ballad' (Walker, 2000, p. 31). In the urban context, swing jazz was popularised through the American presence during the Second World War and, well before Lee Gordon started arranging tours by American musicians, Artie Shaw, Ella Fitzgerald and Buddy Rich toured in 1954 (Stratton, 1992, p. 142). This whitened jazz was in competition with other musics for ballroom dancing and with the musical tradition that came out of Australian vaudeville with its mixed influences from English music hall and American vaudeville [on this history see Waterhouse (1990)].[7]

This is not the place to go into any of this in any more detail. The point is that rock'n'roll, and later musical influences in Australia, did not impact on a country lacking in music. Rather, these new musical forms became incorporated and reworked in relation

to the established very 'white', and predominantly European, in particular English and Irish, musical traditions (most obviously the ballad) which lay at the heart of Australian culture and which had overlapped, merged and in other ways been transformed into a localised Australian musical practice.

Beat, and Rhythm and Blues in England

When thinking about the so-called Beat Boom, in order to understand what happened in Australia we have first to understand what took place in England where the reconstitution of popular music occurred. Dave Laing offers this description of beat music:

> the chord playing of the rhythm guitar … [compared to American rock'n'roll] … was broken up into a series of separate strokes, often one to the bar, with the regular plodding of the bass guitar and crisp drumming behind it. This gave a very different effect from the monolithic character of rock, in that the beat was given not by a duplication of one instrument in the rhythm section by another but by an interplay between all three. This flexibility also meant that beat music could cope with a greater range of time signatures and song shapes than rock and roll had been able to (Laing, 1970, p. 74)

At bottom what the English bands achieved was an integration of the evolving African-American popular music, which was itself much influenced by white American pop, into the sonics of white Anglo-American popular music. Chambers writes that:

> The new music was neither an anonymous dance rhythm nor simply the copy of black sounds. Between the imperatives of the former and the example of the latter, a novel musical synthesis, recognisably British in tone, was produced (Chambers, 1985, p. 64).

He is here thinking specifically of The Beatles, a significant point to which we shall return. Lifting off from Chambers' work, Dick Bradley has described the development of this synthesis as 'codal fusion' (Bradley, 1992).

Chambers goes on to identify the ways African-American popular music was integrated into white pop. This is an important description which I shall draw on considerably in my discussion of Australian beat music so I shall quote it at length. In this new musical hybrid:

> European classical harmony, however simplified, still remained at the centre of white commercial popular music. It drew attention to linear musical development: a recognisable tune, an attractive melody. Black music concentrated its sonorial powers elsewhere, in the vertical interiors of the song: varying the tone, pitch, pulse and rhythm. As a bridge between these two musical continents, beat music displayed, with varying emphases, tendencies, taken from both traditions. So, guitar sounds were frequently 'full' (often underlined by the use of an organ) and employed highly 'coloured' chords that pointed to the previously unsuspected levels and timbres of a song (Chambers, 1985, p. 64).

In The Beatles' music, as in that of the other Mersey-sound bands, the African-American musical influence was contained, limited and placed within a European musical frame of reference which privileged melody and linearity.

At the same time there had been evolving in England what Chambers describes as 'a subterranean blues record culture fed by US servicemen and students, seamen and specialist record shops, largely nurtured around art schools' (Chambers, 1985, p. 51). In

Charlie Gillett's words: 'Rhythm and blues, which was virtually unknown in Britain in 1956, was by 1962 dominant in a subculture which was located in basement clubs throughout the country, whose audience included students at school, college, and university, and an unusual cross section of young working people' (Gillett, 1971, p. 301). In the early 1960s there developed a youth culture, mods, whose choice of music was black, in the main African-American:

> The hard-core Soho mod of 1964, inscrutable behind his shades and 'stingy brim' only deigned to tap his feet (encased in 'basket weaves' or Raoul's originals) to the more esoteric soul imports (Tony Clarke's '(I'm the) Entertainer', James Brown's 'Papa's Got a Brand New Bag', Dobie Gray's '(I'm in with) The In Crowd' or Jamaican ska (Prince Buster's 'Madness') (Hebdige, 1979, p. 53).

The generalised knowledge, and acceptance, of African-American popular music, especially Tamla Motown, is well illustrated in the numbers of hits achieved by African-American artists in Britain. The Motown sound was an integration of gospel, with some R'n'B, and white American pop. Suzanne Smith remarks that: 'Never before had a black-owned company been able to create and produce the artistry of its own community, and then sell it across racial boundaries' (Smith, 1999, p. 5). In Britain, The Supremes had eighteen records in the Top Fifty between 1964 and 1969, Martha Reeves and the Vandellas had five between 1965 and 1969, and Stevie Wonder had eleven between 1966 and 1969. Chuck Berry himself entered the Top Fifty eight times between 1963 and 1965 and even a soul act such as Otis Redding could have thirteen entries between 1965 and 1969 including covers of The Rolling Stones' 'Satisfaction' (1966)—we will return to this below—and The Beatles' 'Day Tripper' (1967) (these figures are from the British Chart Hits of the Sixties website).

Given this albeit limited awareness, but to some extent acceptance, of the 'whiter' end of black American popular music it is no wonder that The Beatles so rapidly became a part of English entertainment. As Chambers puts it, "'beat" was quickly accepted as a speeded up version of popular show business' (Chambers, 1985, p. 52) and 'with their royal premieres and MBEs, the Beatles had seemingly been absorbed into the cushioned category of "family entertainment"' (Chambers, 1985, p. 62).

However, within England we can discern two lines of musical development:

> Where the Beatles had begun experimenting in the popular song tradition, and offered a depreciating humour in their music and films that still left room for sentimentality ('Michelle', 'Yesterday', 'Eleanor Rigby'), the Stones, in the best blues tradition, mumbled disturbing lyrics over neurotic rhythms and a jarring sound that promised no compromise with earlier pop music (Chambers, 1985, p. 68).

The Beatles' influences were pretty much at the white pop end of the African-American music spectrum, Tamla Motown, Chuck Berry's rhythm and blues/rock'n'roll cross-over songs and Arthur Alexander's soft soul with country and western references ('Anna'). The Rolling Stones, the most popular of the rhythm and blues bands, covered the same area, they recorded Chuck Berry songs and Arthur Alexander's 'You Better Move On', but moved much further along the spectrum into both classic blues, Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, and more contemporary rhythm and blues with songs written by Jerry Ragavoy ('Time is on My Side' which was a rhythm and blues hit in the United States for Irma Thomas in 1964) and Bobby and Shirley Womack ('It's All Over Now', a rhythm and blues hit for the Valentinos in 1963).

It needs to be said that the Stones interpreted this music. In blues and soul, in the black tradition generally as demonstrated in its relationship to gospel singing, the instrumentation works to embellish the vocal, and the voice is more intent on expressing emotion than carrying a melody and enunciating the lyrics clearly. In contrast, in that white, Anglo-American popular song tradition within which The Beatles worked, emotion was expressed through the lyrics not through vocal intonation, that is, the singing itself was little coloured by expression. Chambers tells us that: 'Singers like Ray Charles ("I Gotta Woman", 1955; "What'd I Say", 1959) and James Brown ("Please, Please, Please", 1956; "Try Me", 1958), introduced the screams, shouts, sobs and grunts of the preaching and testifying singer' (Chambers, 1985, p. 73). Bradley describes Little Richard as being, 'notable for his "frantic" singing, full of shouts and whoops, and often using minimal or even apparently meaningless lyrics ("Tutti frutti, Hey rootie" or "Awop bop a loo bop a lop bam boom")' (Bradley, 1992, p. 70). In contrast, on studio recordings, at least, John Lennon's tendency to shout, to exclaim nonsense syllables driven by emotional expression, was reigned in. What for black artists was integral to their musical aesthetic was transgressive to the white, melodic, popular music tradition which emphasised the clarity of expression of lyrics—the establishment attacks on The Rolling Stones was due, in part, to their more faithful exploration of the black aesthetic which was, itself, considered morally questionable.

The Stones were not the only band to have developed in this rhythm and blues, and soul, tradition. There were also The Yardbirds, The Animals and to a lesser extent but with an understanding of the aesthetic, The Small Faces and The Who. In addition to the myth that it reproduces the speech pattern of amphetamine users, we can think of Roger Daltrey's stuttering on The Who's 'My Generation' as a white, perhaps English, form of the vocal excess found in black American music.

In Britain in the 1960s the distinction between the two strands of the Beat Boom was not expressed in terms of their relationship to the dominant aesthetic of African American music but, much more socially, in the acceptability or not of the bands, their music, and their behaviour. In Australia the Beat Boom was read as a single phenomenon: some bands played music that was relatively comprehensible, others didn't.

Australia and the Beat Boom

When discussing the impact of the new beat music on Australian popular music it is usual to begin by noting the large number of musicians in Australia who had arrived as British migrants in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Here, for example, is what the important Australian television series which presents a history of Australian rock music, *Long Way to the Top*, says:

> They called it beat music … black music for white teenagers. A lot of them were 'ten quid tourists' and many settled in Adelaide. After being billeted for a while with their families in hostels, they moved out to brand new suburbs like Elizabeth, built from nothing on reclaimed salt marsh.
>
> A quarter of a million British born migrants came to Australia in the late fifties and early sixties. They would introduce a musical tradition that would influence three decades of Australian pop music: Jim Keyes [Keays], The Masters Apprentices, the Easybeats, Johnny Young, Dinah Lee, Michael Chugg … the list goes on (*Long Way to the Top*, episode 2 'Ten Pound Rockers 1963–1968'. Taken here from the notes on the website).

Elizabeth was a new suburb, built in the 1950s seventeen miles north of Adelaide [for the purposes of this article the best description of Elizabeth can be found in Zion (1987)]. The 1966 census shows that, at that time, 48% of the population had been born in the British Isles (Peel, 1995, p. 114). In his important article on the role of British immigrants in the reception of The Beatles in Australia, Lawrence Zion writes that these 'new arrivals were highly active in the process of the diffusion of pop music styles from Britain in ways that operated independently from the influence of the mass media in Australia' (Zion, 1987, p. 301). As the biggest concentration of British migrants, Elizabeth became home to numbers of Australian beat bands, the most successful of which were The Twilights and Masters Apprentices. The impact continued into the next generation, the families of Doc Neeson, from pub rock band The Angels, and Jimmy Barnes, of Cold Chisel, had also migrated to Elizabeth.

What these migrants had in common, including those who had migrated before the advent of The Beatles, The Stones and the general reformation of popular music, was a British musical sensibility in which the rock beat had become much more accepted than in Australia. In Britain, as we have seen, there was an established underground subculture involved in black American music. Starting in 1948, through the 1950s this was reinforced by the migration of West Indians to Britain. As Dick Hebdige has written: 'By the early 60s … sizeable immigrant communities had been established in Britain's working-class areas, and some kind of rapport between blacks and neighbouring white groups had become possible' (Hebdige, 1979, p. 52). In Australia, where the White Australia policy was not phased out until the late 1960s and early 1970s, there was no significant non-indigenous black presence [on the history of the White Australia policy, and the shift to multiculturalism see Castles (1992); also Stratton (1998)]. Moreover, as we have already seen, the cultural effects of the presence of African-American servicemen during the Second World War, which had had a great influence on the development of the bodgie and widgie subculture in the immediate post-war period (Stratton, 1992) had been rolled back under the withering pressure of white middle-class Anglo-Australian conservatism.

This context makes the success of Australia's great 1950s rocker, Johnny O'Keefe, even more extraordinary. His version of the Isley Brothers' 'Shout', released as a single in 1959, especially in live performance, utilised a degree of vocal excess unheard of in Australia at that time. However, his early recordings swung from Bill Haley's white countryish '(You Hit the Wrong Note) Billy Goat' to Lloyd Price's rhythm and blues 'Lawdy Miss Clawdy' to Pat Boone's pop balladic 'There's a Goldmine in the Sky'. O'Keefe's failure in the United States shows, above all, how much he continued to perform with an Australian white popular music sensibility as his reference point, making his rock too white for white American audiences. These audiences simply failed to distinguish anything particularly special about him [there are now two biographies of Johnny O'Keefe: Bryden-Brown (1982) and Johnstone (2001)]. Selling him as an Australian only made O'Keefe a novelty act.

I have already shown how the presence of African-Americans and West Indians coupled with a longstanding post-war interest among a minority in Britain had impacted on the English musical sensibility as demonstrated in the number of African-American performers who made the British charts, and the amount of times they did so, albeit mostly from the 'whiter' end of the musical spectrum. In Australia, where the African-American influence was much more stoutly resisted, the chart figures ably show the comparatively minor influence of African-American music on the Australian musical sensibility. Starting with Motown groups, between 1963 and 1968 The Supremes had six

hits in Australia, with only one ('The Happening') reaching the Top Ten; Stevie Wonder had one hit, a cover of Dylan's 'Blowin' In The Wind' which only reached number thirty-five; Martha Reeves and the Vandellas didn't get into the Australian charts at all, nor did The Temptations. Outside of Motown, Chuck Berry had two hits during this period, the highest placed being 'You Never Can Tell' which got to number eighteen. Otis Redding made the charts once with '(Sitting On The) Dock Of The Bay'.[8]

The Beatles had the two top selling singles in Australia in 1963, 'She Loves You' followed by 'I Want to Hold Your Hand'. The only other English beat band to be in the year's best sellers was Brian Poole and the Tremeloes; 'Do You Love Me?' came in at number thirteen. Cliff Richard and the Shadows, an outfit from the pre-beat boom era, made number twenty with their tuneful sing-a-long, 'Summer Holiday'. Billy Thorpe had been born in Manchester, England, and migrated to Brisbane with his family when he was a child. In 1963 he moved to Sydney and joined up with a band called The Aztecs [for Billy Thorpe's own account see Thorpe (1996)]. Billy Thorpe and The Aztecs had their first hit in 1964 with a version of 'Poison Ivy'. In Australia that year The Beatles had six of the eight top selling singles. This list included two female pop ballad singers, Julie Rogers at number five with 'The Wedding' and Cilla Black at number six with 'You're My World'. Billy Thorpe and The Aztecs' 'Poison Ivy' was the ninth highest seller and their version of 'Sick and Tired' was the seventeenth.

Now, the Billy Thorpe version of 'Poison Ivy' came from The Rolling Stones' version on their first EP (Extended Player). The Stones did not have a best selling single in any of the Australian yearly charts for 1963, 1964 or 1965. Indeed, The Stones only had one number one in Australia in the 1960s, a cover of The Drifters' 'Under the Boardwalk' in 1965. Not even 'Satisfaction', perhaps their most well-known track, which reached number one in both Britain and the United States, sold enough copies to top the charts in Australia. On that first EP, along with 'Poison Ivy', were versions of Chuck Berry's 'Bye Bye Johnny', 'Money', a rhythm and blues hit for Barrett Strong, and a version of Arthur Alexander's 'You Better Move On'. Of all these American-originated songs only 'Poison Ivy' was written by non-blacks, Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller who were two Jews who specialised in writing pop-oriented, melodic soft-soul numbers and novelty songs for black vocal groups like The Drifters and The Coasters. 'Under the Boardwalk' was also one of their compositions.

In choosing 'Poison Ivy' then, Billy Thorpe and The Aztecs had taken the 'whitest' sounding of the tracks on the Stones' EP and produced a whitened cover of the Stones' already whitened cover. Listening to Billy Thorpe and The Aztecs' version what you hear is a tuneful song sung by a solo singer with a backing instrumental band. The lyrics are clearly enunciated, emotion is not expressed, the band plays to a regular beat. I want to emphasise that my object is not to denigrate Billy Thorpe and The Aztecs' achievement. Quite the reverse. They made a black(ish) pop song accessible to a young white Australian audience. Billy Thorpe and The Aztecs' second successful single was 'Mashed Potato'. This has a white rock'n'roll sound to it, more or less an instrumental with Thorpe singing with echo, 'Mashed potato, yeah, yeah, yeah'. In an interview in 1994, Thorpe identifies a Rufus Thomas original,[9] however the most well-known version is by Dee Dee Sharp. Wherever Thorpe got it, the band seem to have stripped out the lyrics and transformed it into the style of instrumental surf music made popular in Australia by groups like The Atlantics. This single did not make the top twenty single sales for 1964, perhaps because it sounded too much like a throwback for an audience now looking for a regular, insistent beat. With their third successful single, Billy Thorpe and The Aztecs continued the practice of covering a white version of a black song. In

this case, 'Sick and Tired' was a Fats Domino original covered by The Searchers on their first album. As before, Thorpe gives a performance that concentrates on the melody while the band provide an instrumental backing. Once again this whitening of a white version of a black song was successful. It was the seventeenth biggest selling Australian single in 1964.

That Billy Thorpe and his audience understood him to be working out of a white popular music heritage is clear from his subsequent singles. In *Sex and Thugs and Rock'n'Roll*, his autobiography of the period, Thorpe writes that:

> We'd asked the crowd at Surf City [where they had a residency] what songs they'd like us to record and the overwhelming consensus was 'Poison Ivy', 'Zip-a-Dee-Doo-Dah', 'Sick and Tired', a song of Tony's [an English migrant band member, Tony Barber], 'That I Love', and a ballad I'd sung since I was a child originally recorded by Judy Garland, 'Over the Rainbow'. The response to these songs had been phenomenal and it was obvious that we would sell thousands of copies to just the Surf City crowds, which would guarantee us at least charting in Sydney (Thorpe, 1996, p. 364).

Here we can see that Thorpe and The Aztecs' set contained white popular music standards as well as white, beat versions of black music. The Beatles who, as we have seen, worked in the same white, popular music tradition, can be found on the *Live! At the Star-Club in Hamburg, Germany; 1962* album, taped before the band's grooming for success in Britain, singing Marlene Dietrich's ballad 'Falling in Love Again' and also 'Red Sails in the Sunset' which was written for the 1935 musical *Provincetown Follies*. Billy Thorpe and The Aztecs' version of 'Somewhere Over the Rainbow', complete with strings, was released in late 1964. It gave them their biggest hit to date.[10] Their follow-up was another pop ballad, 'I Told the Brook', written, and previously recorded, by the American country and western singer, Marty Robbins. Thorpe and The Aztecs worked within a musical tradition that ensured their music was whiter than that of The Beatles.

The Beatles toured Australia in June 1964. The visit was a watershed in Australian culture. The crowds were huge, usually said to have been the biggest anywhere. In Adelaide the crowds were the biggest of all. Glenn A. Baker, in his history of the tour, *The Beatles Down Under*, writes that: 'Police estimates of the motorcade route [from the airport to the city] crowd was 200,000 plus' (Baker, 1982, p. 43). On The Easybeats section of the Milesago website, the anonymous author writes that: 'On their Adelaide visit, it was estimated that at least 300,000 people—virtually half the population of the city at that time—turned out to see [The Beatles]'. Zion argues that one cause of this was the very large number of British migrants in Adelaide: 'Between 1954 and 1966 almost a quarter of a million British born migrants arrived in Australia. … Over a quarter of them settled in South Australia, which almost doubled their proportion of the population of that state to over 11 per cent, which far exceeded the national figure of less than 8 per cent' (Zion, 1987, p. 294). In Britain the four lovable mop-tops with their zany sense of humour were already incorporated as family fun. They had appeared on the Royal Variety Show in 1963 and, in 1965, would be given MBEs. In 1964 their film *A Hard Day's Night* had a royal première (Chambers, 1985, pp. 51–52). In Australia, however, The Beatles were positioned quite differently. Their music was at the outer edge of young people's ability to accommodate and comprehend the African-American influence in white popular music.

Where The Beatles toured to massive crowds—in Melbourne there were around 5,000 at the airport, 30,000 packing the motorcade route to the city and 20,000 outside their

hotel (Baker, 1982, p. 55)—when The Rolling Stones came a year later they would be on a bill with Roy Orbison, The Searchers and Australian bands The Twilights and Max Merritt (who was originally from New Zealand).[11] The Stones' sets included Howlin' Wolf's 'Little Red Rooster', Chuck Berry's 'Around and Around', Rufus Thomas' 'Walking the Dog' and their own composition 'Heart of Stone' at a time when blues-based music was virtually unknown in Australia. They played the Manufacturers Auditorium in the Agricultural Hall in Sydney, and the Palais Theatre in St Kilda. Where The Stones were comparatively ignored, Derek Taylor wrote in the *Los Angeles Times* in May 1967:

> It was clear that many of the 11 million people in Australia viewed The Beatles in a messianic light. They were invited to lay their hands on cripples, to pose on balconies before almost the entire population of many large cities, to watch ethnic dance displays and to attend mayoral receptions like visiting heads of state (Baker, 1982, p. 9).

The Stones' music simply did not make sense to the majority of Australian young people. While the Stones did develop a following it was relatively small and, we might say, very subcultural—an audience who prided themselves on their knowledge and liking for African-American influenced music. For Australians it was The Beatles, the understandable and nostalgic evokers of the white colonial Home, who also provided the music of youthful fun and rebellion.

Billy Thorpe and The Aztecs were being highly successful doing covers of covers, whitening the material into the white melodic popular music tradition. The Beatles were further out. They were the English real thing, performing sweetened covers and their own melodic beat songs. Here, too, we find the ideology of derivation at work. While they were themselves, in one sense derivative, in the colonial context The Beatles, coming from the motherland, were constructed as authentic, where authenticity was assumed to reside in an English origin. In addition, for all those British migrants, The Beatles satisfied a nostalgia for England and its everyday life impossible to obtain from The Rolling Stones with their self-conscious celebration of African-American popular music and their disregard for the niceties of English society.

Formed in 1964 during the high period of Australian Beatlemania, The Twilights epitomised many of the points I have been making. They came out of Elizabeth and, of the six band members two, Terry Britten and Glen Shorrock, were English migrants while Clem 'Paddy' McCartney came from Belfast.[12] The anonymous author of The Twilights article on the Howlspace: Music from Australia and New Zealand website writes that the:

> Elizabeth connection … , via the English migrants and their relatives back home, gave The Twilights access to the latest records from the Old Country before they were released here. The Twilights' other advantage was their ability to reproduce those records almost perfectly on stage, with the Beatles their speciality.[13]

This is written through the ideology of imitation. After all, the English bands of the Beat Boom reproduced, often very closely, the black American material that they covered. The point to be made is a different one, that while The Twilights could 'rock out with wild abandon',[14] they did so while continuing to emphasise and privilege the musical bases of the white popular music tradition, most importantly melody as a way of linearly organising the beat and a vocal oriented towards singing on the beat, enunciating lyrics and singing notes with as little sliding around of the voice as possible. In this context

it is important to note that, in the first instance, it was The Beatles' music, rather than that of the rhythm'n'blues-influenced bands, that The Twilights focused on reproducing.

In playing Beatles' songs—many of which were themselves whitened covers—note for note, The Twilights were operating within a Western classical music regime founded on the writing out of musical scores, even though the band may well have learnt the music from records. This tradition emphasises accuracy of reproduction and allows emotional expression in the form of the music itself and in the manner of playing the score.

In common with the majority of Australians The Twilights seem not to have registered a difference in musical interests between the English beat bands and the rhythm and blues groups. All offered music for interpretation.[15] After two singles penned by members of the group, The Twilights covered The Animals' version of the traditional American blues-folk song 'Baby Let Me Take You Home' which that band had taken from Bob Dylan's eponymously titled first album where the song was called 'Baby, Let Me Follow You Down'.[16] This was followed by a version of The Beatles' cover of the rhythm and blues singer Freddie Williams' 'Bad Boy'. The Twilights' Australian sales breakthrough came with their next single, a melodic cover of the Velvelettes' 'Needle in a Haystack', itself a typical Tamla Motown sweet soul/white pop crossover tune.

By the time The Twilights made their first album, released in 1966, they were in a position to record whitened versions of original material now being released by the English beat and r'n'b bands. Thus, *The Twilights* includes versions of songs by The Small Faces ('Sorry She's Mine'), The Who ('LaLaLa Lies'—a version which includes a reading of the hook in impeccable English as 'Lie Lie Lie Lies'), The Hollies ('Yes I Will'), The Moody Blues ('Let Me Go') and of The Yardbirds' version of Mose Allison's 'I'm Not Talking'. Most fascinating of all, from the point of view of the argument I am making here, is the album's closing track, a reading of The Rolling Stones' '(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction'.

The Stones own version of 'Satisfaction', as I mentioned earlier, did not make number one in Australia and in general The Stones' music, like that of the other English rhythm and blues bands, was in their own versions, much too 'black' for Australians. The Stones' 'Satisfaction', like a lot of their work from this period, has an ambient echo quality to it. The track opens with Keith Richards' guitar playing what Richard Unterberger, on the website All Music Guide, calls a fuzz riff.[17] This menacing sound is followed by the entry of the rhythm section in a musical structure which emphasises the off-beat and drives the track with a pounding regularity. Against the deliberately muddy production Jagger's vocal, which is mixed into the instruments far more than in the beat band sound, takes on a confessional quality until the almost-shouted chorus. Mick Farren, who used to be the lead singer of the notorious late-1960s English band The Deviants and now writes for the English weekly music paper *New Musical Express*, has described the Stones' version as: 'The ultimate and classic master class rock song, and textbook blending of guitar hook and vocal shout' (Farren, 2002, p. 70). In this version, following the black musical aesthetic, melodic clarity is secondary to emotional expression.

The Twilights produce a 'beat' version with a white-soul vocal. The lead guitar is pulled back into the instrumental ensemble, the echo and muddiness is taken away, and the beat is speeded up to give a faster, regular rhythm. The effect is much brighter and, needless to say, much whiter. The vocal, though, is particularly interesting as it is pulled forward in the mix, producing that conventional relation of singer and backing band. What the audience is offered is a soulful expression, the use of emotional charge

in the vocal delivery. At the same time, the vocal works to carry the melody and express the lyrics. It is worth briefly comparing The Twilights' version with that of the classic soul singer, Otis Redding. Here, it is the voice that dominates the entire musical organisation. Redding embellishes the vocal line using gospel phrasing with his primary objective to express emotion. To this end words are added, noises uttered; the song becomes a vocal performance of, perhaps, despair. The instruments carry the rhythm and the brass section compliments the vocal development. In short, the two cover versions are intent on quite opposite readings of the song in spite of an apparent similarity. Redding's version invokes the African-American musical aesthetic while that of The Twilights' places the song within the English beat tradition of white, popular music. In this way The Twilights made the song acceptable, and probably for the first time sonically readable, to large numbers of Australians.

In 1966 The Twilights won the national Hoadley's Battle of the Sounds competition and a free trip to England. There they failed. The interpretative qualities that gave the band its success in Australia marked it as imitative in the 'home country'. Indeed, retrospectively, The Twilights could be thought of as the first tribute band. In Australia their success continued through 1967. Returning from England they were able to play the entirety of The Beatles' *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1967) and The Small Faces' *Ogden's Nut Gone Flake* (1968) albums on stage. What these two records have in common, aside from both being integrated concept albums, is the English music hall influence. In 1968 The Twilights' proposed television show, *Once Upon A Twilight*, was cancelled, a symptom of their declining popularity in Australia, and in 1969 the band broke up. Glenn Shorrock, one of its two lead singers, later utilised his Australian popular music sensibility as singer in the Little River Band. Shorrock and other Australian musicians formed LRB in 1975. They became very popular among the white MOR (Middle of the Road) audience in the United States. Since the1970s the band has had nine Top Ten American singles.

Billy Thorpe and The Aztecs, and The Twilights, were manifestations of an Australian popular music sensibility which was fundamentally European-derived, white. It was a tradition that valued melody, musical linearity and lyrical clarity. These Australian bands of the beat boom, in particular Billy Thorpe and The Aztecs, and the hugely successful Easybeats—who only had one hit in England, 'Friday On My Mind'—laid the basis for the flowering of Australian rock in the 1970s and for pub rock groups such as Rose Tattoo, The Angels, Midnight Oil, Cold Chisel, Australian Crawl, and, in the 2000s, You Am I and Powderfinger among others. These bands form a tradition that has continued to blend melody with strong guitar riffs and a pounding beat.

Billy Thorpe's self-penned 'Most People I Know (Think That I'm Crazy)', released in 1972, with its melody, driving beat and anthemic chorus combined with an emphasis on the lyrics, provided a template for Australian rock, for a tradition of bands—those pub rock bands that I mentioned above—whose success in Australia has, in the main, continued to be far greater than what they have achieved overseas.[18] This tradition continues to privilege elements drawn from the white, European musical tradition over influences from African-American, and other black musics. This hard rock development in Australia has another strand, the importance of the traditional ballad tradition and, along with this, the influence of American country music. The combination of these was most obvious in the work of Cold Chisel (see Stratton, 2004). Yes, there is a specifically Australian popular music sound, and one place to look for an important moment in its evolution is the beat bands of the early-to-mid-1960s.

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Notes

[1] Turner's position has a history. In 1988 Lawrence Zion argued, in a piece entitled 'The Sound of Australian Music', that: 'The trap to be avoided … is the search for an indigenous sound'. Zion suggests that: 'What Midnight Oil, and other groups such as Mental as Anything, Cold Chisel and Hunters and Collectors have shown, is that it is possible to be musically creative and build up a local following without simply imitating overseas groups' (p. 222). However, Zion's claim is that there is nothing particularly Australian about the sound of these groups.

[2] The origins of this tradition are made clear in Tommy Steele's 1960 No. 5 hit, 'What a Mouth', a song first made popular by the music hall artist Harry Champion, and Herman's Hermits' 1965 recording of 'I'm Henry the VIII I Am', a huge hit for the band in the United States, and another song popularised by Champion.

[3] At the 2000 Australian Cultural Studies Association Conference in Brisbane, Christina George gave a paper on the cultural specificity of recent Australian popular music. The paper was entitled 'Re-making Genres—Surfing and silverchair'. It argues that: 'Australian music in the 1990s and early 21st century is a hybrid form and collection of sounds, representing the nation in its current social and political status'.

[4] Here it is important to acknowledge the ABC television series, *Long Way to the Top*, available on VHS and DVD, which asserted this same point for a general audience.

[5] Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett has used the idea of sensibility in her discussion of the revival of klezmer music. She links it to Raymond Williams' celebrated notion of structure of feeling. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett writes that: 'In the hiatus between the old and the new [klezmer] players can be found keys to changes of sensibility that have made today's scene possible. Whatever their ostensible subject, the essays in this issue sound the sensibilities specific to the klezmer phenomenon of the last twenty-five years. They show "klezmer music" to be a powerful index of what Raymond Williams has called changing structures of feeling' (1998). I am using the idea in a national sense to suggest the cultural specificity of musical understanding. The dominant musical understanding refers to that understanding most prevalent, and most taken-for-granted, in the national culture. This shared understanding underpins both the production and consumption of music in a culture.

[6] The idea of the cultural cringe was first introduced by the critic Arthur Phillips in the 1950s, but for a more recent discussion see the section 'The Colonial Cultural Cringe' in Alomes (1999).

[7] Waterhouse explains that there was a vogue for black-face minstrel shows. However, rather than sensitising the audience to African-American musical forms, these shows worked within the white musical sensibility of the audience.

[8] These figures were kindly supplied by Ken Smith who runs the Oz Net Music Chart site. The website address is: http://www.onmc.iinet.net.au/. For comparison, during the same period (1963–1968) in the United States, The Supremes had twenty hits including eleven number ones, Stevie Wonder had thirteen hits, Martha Reeves and the Vandellas had twelve hits and Marvin Gaye, who had no hits in Australia, had eighteen US hits. Chuck Berry was in the American charts three times in this period and Otis Redding eleven times. (These figures are also courtesy of Ken Smith.)

[9] Thorpe: '(sings) Mashed potato, yeah, yeah … (laughs). When I listen to the original, I mean the original by Rufus Thomas was like (renders song in big solid bluesy style) … but ours was like (pinches nose and gives weedy, anaemic reading). Heh, it was just ridiculous! Like wind-up toys!' This interview can be found on the Billy Thorpe and the Aztecs Milesago website.

[10] This claim is made on the Billy Thorpe and the Aztecs Milesago website at: http://www.milesago.com/Artists/thorpe.htm#Biography. This site is an Australian Music Industry project and usually accurate. The single does not show up in the best-selling charts for either 1964 or 1965 which may be because the sales were split over the two years.

[11] Some accounts have The Twilights supporting The Rolling Stones on their 1966 tour instead.

[12] The intersection of English beat music with the Irish musical heritage is another topic again. Perhaps it is most obviously encapsulated in Them, and Van Morrison's later, solo career. A history of Irish pop(ular) music can be found on the VHS/DVD release *From a Whisper to a Scream*.

[13] 'The Twilights' Howlspace: Music from Australia and NZ, at http://www.howlspace.com.au/en/twilights/twilights.htm.

[14] 'The Twilights' Milesago at wysiwyg://24/http://www.geocities.com/soho/square/8216/twilights.htm.

[15] Zion's concern in Zion (1987) is with why Australian popular music shifted its site of influence from the United States, to which the early rockers such as Johnny O'Keefe had looked, to Britain. His answer is

related to the experiences of the high number of British migrants in the post-Second World War period, arguing that: 'the Easybeats and other "immigrant" groups shared … a desire to reinvent their respective cultural backgrounds in Australia due to feelings of displacement from their new home environment' (p. 304).

[16] On *Bob Dylan* 'Baby, Let Me Follow You Down' is attributed to Ric Von Schmidt. In later performances Dylan clarifies that he learnt the song from Schmidt.

[17] See Richard Unterberger, '(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction' at http://www.allmusic.com/cg/amg.dll?p = amg&uid = 10:32:52|PM&sql = X2770279.

[18] The most important exceptions here are AC/DC and INXS. This is not the place to discuss why these bands were more marketable outside Australia than, say, Cold Chisel, or even Midnight Oil. We should not forget the exceptional success of that Anglo-Australian band The Bee Gees who started out as pop ballad singers.

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