

**Classic Rock in the Year of Revolt:
Using the Illusion of Life to Examine the Hits of 1968**

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Keynote Presentation at the European Conference on Media, Communication & Film 2018

July 9, 2018

Unabridged version

Abstract

This is not the first generation facing a fearful future. Exactly fifty years ago, 1968 – nestled between the Summer of Love ('67) and Woodstock ('69) - was known as the year of revolt. From Vietnam protests and Civil Rights marches, to the assassinations of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, American culture, like that of countries around the world, was awash in struggle yet alive in activist ideology. In particular, Classic Rock of the era served as a reflection of the times, a call to action, and eventually offered enduring insight into the qualities of effective protest music. Using Sellnow's Illusion of Life methodology, which examines music as rhetoric, this essay analyses the top ten hits of that year (per <http://ultimateclassicrock.com>), including such timeless masterpieces as Joplin's "Piece of my Heart," Cream's "White Room," Hendrix's "All Along the Watchtower," and the Rolling Stones' "Sympathy for the Devil." The humanistic methodology begins by identifying first the patterns found in the songs' virtual time (music) and virtual experience (lyrics). Analysis then delves into the use of strategies such as congruity and incongruity to get across meaning. Interpretations are offered on the impact such works had on their original generation, and concludes with applications for today.

Keywords: Sellnow, illusion of life, music, classic rock, 1968

Introduction

I want to thank IAFOR for inviting me to deliver this keynote address today. It's a distinct pleasure to have the opportunity to speak on this brilliant theme: "Fearful Futures."

In describing the theme, the call for papers said we are at a critical moment in international history. Multiculturalism is being threatened by a "destructive and potentially genocidal ethno-nationalism, the ferocity of which is fueled by economic disparity, religious intolerance and retrograde ideologies regarding gender, race and sexuality." Fearful indeed.

While I want to have an international empathy in my talk, given my background, my focus is obviously on the United States landscape. Let's take a quick look at the American vista. A U.S. president who is not trusted by many; who belongs to a political party seemingly more interested in victory than in the needs of its people. Racial tensions. Black athletes being ostracized for expressing their views about oppression. Frequent headlines about shootings. Urban turmoil often brought about by clashes between law enforcement and citizens of color.

I am talking, of course, about 1968.

You see, this is not the first time we've been faced with a fearful future. The parallels between today's tensions, and those of exactly 50 years ago, are astounding. And we survived then; otherwise we'd be living a complete dystopian nightmare now. Spanish philosopher George Santayana wrote "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." We seem to have forgotten lessons we learned back then about civil rights, and about just civility in general. But it is not too late for us to remember them now.

We must remember how good people, youth in particular, banded together for what is right. We moved forward – together – to explore space and our own planet, and made advances in computing and technology, to degrees only imagined before in science fiction. And on the humanitarian front, for the most part, our better natures have prevailed.

And, I will argue, music has been the constant backdrop accompanying our success.

Over the next thirty-five minutes or so, I hope to accomplish the following:

- Provide a summary of key happenings in 1968, and explain how the youth movements – and the rock music they listened to – were an essential element
- Offer a methodology – Sellnow's Illusion of Life – for examining the rhetorical properties of music
- Using the method, analyze the top ten classic rock hits of 1968, identifying the elements that made the songs both timeless and inspirational
- And finally, conclude with some commentary and applications for today's fearful future

1968: The Year of Revolt

When one pictures the United States of the 1960's, thoughts often turn to the hippie movement; images of young men and women with long hair, living in communes, wearing psychedelic clothing and love beads, flashing "peace" signs, and all with a penchant for sex, drugs, and rock-and-roll. But 1968 stands out as unique year in that era. Known as the Year of Revolt, it stood in stark contrast to the more peaceful years that surrounded it.

1967, in contrast, was known as the Summer of Love. The definitive song that year was Scott McKenzie's lilting tune, "San Francisco." Written by John Phillips of the Mamas and the Papas, the lyrics asked those going to San Francisco to "be sure to wear some flowers in your hair." It was the year the Beatles' released the feel-good album *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, and the year drug-guru Timothy Leary spoke to 30,000 hippies at an event called the "Human Be-In," and encouraged everyone to "Turn on, tune in, drop out."

Two years later, in March 1969, Beatles member John Lennon and new wife Yoko Ono were married. The couple held two week-long Bed-ins - a version of the hippie sit-ins adapted to a honeymoon motif - where Lennon penned the definitive song of *that* year, "(All we are saying is) Give Peace a Chance."

More important, from August 15–17, 1969, the Woodstock concert - touted as "three days of peace and music" - was held on a 600-acre farm about 100 miles north of New York City (Miles, 2004, p. 315). About 50,000 people were expected. Over 400,000 thousand showed up. If you've seen the photos or film, you know that it rained most of the time, and about a half-million muddy hippies jostled for dry spaces and woefully limited toilet facilities. But what should have been a disaster is fondly remembered as a defining moment, not only in music history, but for an era of love, sexual expression, unity, and peace.

But '67's Summer of Love and '69's Woodstock were but idyllic bookends to the violence-stained 1968. Author Greil Marcus (2009) recalls '68 "as a year of horror and bad faith, fervor and despair" (p. 331). CNN commentator David Axelrod writes, "If I hadn't lived through 1968, I might dismiss a film recounting the explosive events of that year as some sort of fictional dystopia, a dark political thriller sprung from Hollywood's fertile imagination" (np).

In 2018, it has become a sadly humorous exercise to check the morning's news and see what new fiasco or crisis or incendiary tweet occurred during the night. The feeling was similar in 1968. Gould claimed, "the nation seemed to lurch from one shock to another" (p. 60), and White described it "as if the future waited on the first of each month to deliver events completely unforeseen the month before" (1969, p. 107).

Let's look briefly at some of those key events.

In 1968, the Vietnam war took its toll on the country, and on incumbent President Lyndon Johnson. On January 30, the North Vietnamese attacked South Vietnamese and U.S. forces during the presumed cease-fire of the Vietnamese New Year. Known as the Tet Offensive, the attack proved that the conflict would be prolonged, and prompted famed CBS news anchor Walter Cronkite to make an editorial comment calling for negotiated withdrawal from the war. Johnson reportedly said that, if he's lost Cronkite, he's lost middle America (Nelson, 2014). In March, more than five hundred South Vietnamese (half teenagers or younger) were killed by American soldiers in a handful of small villages. Referred to collectively as the My Lai Massacre, it was originally covered up by the U.S. Government, and eventually led to the court martial of 24-year-old Lt. William Calley, Jr. Many felt Calley was a scapegoat and, while dismissed from the military, he served only 3.5 years under house arrest (Jones, 2017).

These events led to increased student protests and continuous bad press for Johnson, who ultimately chose not to run for re-election. Republications ran Richard Nixon as their candidate, claiming he was the only one who could lead us out of Vietnam (McGinniss, 1969;

Nelson, 2014). Despite being known to the public as “Tricky Dick,” the onus of war is why we elected a man who would eventually resign the presidency in shame following the illegal break-in at Watergate.

1968 was also marred by two horrific assassinations. On April 4, the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. – arguably the nation’s most respected and effective civil rights advocate – was shot and killed outside of the Loraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee. Two months later, after delivering a speech on how he would work to heal divisions between blacks and whites, Democratic presidential nominee Robert F. Kennedy (brother to the assassinated president John F. Kennedy) himself was shot. He died the morning of June 6 (Gould, 1993).

Nelson (2014) argued that, climaxing in 1968, race was the central issue dividing Americans. Following the death of Martin Luther King, Jr. Riots were reported in Washington, D.C., Wilmington (Delaware), Detroit, Kansas City, New York City, Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Trenton (New Jersey), and Louisville (Kentucky). Gould (1993) reports that in Chicago, Mayor Richard Daly ordered police to “shoot to kill” rioters. Months later, Chicago was again the site of civil unrest. The Democratic national convention, which suffered its own identity crisis, was disrupted when thousands of anti-war demonstrators took to the streets.

A more poignant protest occurred at the 1968 Olympics in Mexico. Long before Colin Kaepernick and other NFL football players created controversy by kneeling during the singing of the national anthem, John Carlos and Tommie Smith – American athletes competing in the 200-yard dash - were both lauded and criticized for their politicizing an athletic event. After taking gold and bronze in the event, the two men climbed the award stand. They had removed their shoes to signify poverty, and wore beads around their necks to represent countless black men who had murdered for the color of their skin. When the national anthem started to play, they bowed their heads and raised gloved fists in a silent show of power and unity (Marcus, 2009). They were immortalized in an iconic photo by John Dominos that captures the intensity of the moment; a moment which caused them to be sent home from the competition and barred from the Olympics for life.

What’s most amazing about these stories from 1968 is that this wasn’t just happening in the United States. There is no time to elaborate, but I invite you to visit works such as Gildea, Mark and Warring’s (2013) interviews with dozens of activists worldwide, who reference similar movements in Central America, Africa, Cuba, Vietnam, and China. Similarly, Kusin (1973) examines the Czechoslovak movement of 1968; Langland (2013) shares stories of student protests in military Brazil; and Markarian (2017) reports the same phenomenon in Uruguay. Fink, Gassert, and Junker (1998) continue with additional tales from East and West Germany, Italy, Spain, Israel, and Poland. Finally, Frazier and Cohen (2009) add gender politics to the mix, adding more stories from Vietnam, Mexico, Cuba, and Africa; concluding that “Nineteen sixty-eight was a pivotal year on a global scale. In cities throughout the globe, young people took over streets. They blockaded buildings, verbally and symbolically attacked state political apparatuses and projects, and challenged conventional imperialist world orderings” (p. 1).

In the words of Goodman, Brandon and Fisher, “The world smoldered in the 1960s and was on fire by 1968 with each hot spot covered by the nightly news” (2017, p. 76). And, they continue, because the corporate structure of the music industry made possible the worldwide distribution of record albums, it allowed musicians to become the poets and prophets of the

revolt. Industrialized music releases meant the rhetoric of the social movement was restated “every time people turned on the car radio” (p. 78).

And what they heard was rock and roll. In a 1960s interview, Paul Kantner, songwriter and guitarist for the popular band Jefferson Airplane, stated “Rock’n’roll is the new form of communication for our generation” (Miles, 2004, p. 44). And record producer Joe Boyd, reflecting back on the era, explained the impact, noting a popular saying in his business: “When the mode of music changes, the walls of the city shake” (Miles, 2004, p. 174).

Sellnow’s Illusion of Life Methodology

Of course, the extent to which city walls shake is not an accurate technique for measuring the *rhetorical* power of music’s symbolic message. We need a tool for assessing music.

Enter the *Illusion of Life* methodology, developed by Deanna Sellnow currently of the University of Central Florida in the USA. Adapting philosopher Susanne Langer’s work on aesthetic symbolism, Sellnow’s model examines both the discursive and nondiscursive elements of music. While I will reference several works that Deanna and her husband Tim have published over the years, the source I’ll most use and recommend is her textbook *The Rhetorical Power of Popular Culture: Considering Mediated Texts*, now in its 3rd edition from Sage.

Sellnow believes that music is a rhetorical artifact, offering persuasive arguments that either reinforce or challenge taken-for-granted beliefs and behaviors. The performance by the artist offers a *symbolic* perspective on lived experience – an *illusion* of life, so to speak.

This is particularly useful when examining messages of revolt. Sellnow (1999) argues that “submerged” groups - those not in power- need to find a way to legitimize their message and their voice. They do so by employing “modes of communication other than the conventional discursive language system, which tends to perpetuate the hegemonic worldview held by the dominant culture” (p. 67). In other words, music.

The humanistic critic examines both the nondiscursive music – which Sellnow refers to as **Virtual Time** – and the discursive lyrics – or **Virtual Experience** – and how they work together to function rhetorically.

Let’s look first at Virtual Time. It is “virtual” because it is a step removed from and suspends the linear, one-dimensional time that punctuates our days. We don’t measure music in seconds, minutes, and hours; we measure it in the emotions that are created by the artist, within the genre, using rhythm, harmony, melody, phrasing, and instrumentation. Sellnow and Sellnow (2001) explain that these nondiscursive features go beyond fixed symbols like math or language. “In short,” they conclude, “music sounds the way feelings feel” (p. 397).

In assessing Virtual Time, the rhetor differentiates between two forms of timing: **Intensity Patterns** and **Release Patterns**. Briefly, the former creates feelings of tension while the latter creates feelings of relief. One riles you up, the other calms you down.

More specifically, Intensity Patterns tend to include driving tempos, fast or allegro rate, unpredictable changes, short-tones, staccato pacing, and tend to be amplified. In contrast,

Release Patterns have a relaxed tempo, a slower or largo rate, consistent meter, long tones, smooth pacing, and tend to be acoustic.

The fixed, discursive elements are found in a song's lyrics, or Virtual Experience; again, a symbolic portrayal of life experiences. Sellnow differentiates between two types of storylines: **Comic Lyrics** and **Tragic Lyrics**.

Now, this goes beyond Comic meaning just “Ha-Ha, funny” and Tragic meaning “Boo-hoo, sad.” In a Comic Lyric, the storyline is about a protagonist determined to beat the odds; failure is not an option. In the Tragic Lyric, the protagonist is trying to cope with fate; there is generally a sense of hopelessness.

Not always, but usually the Comic Lyric setting is characterized by **Dramatic Illusion**; it is forward-looking, generally into an unknown future. In contrast, Tragic Lyrics lean toward **Poetic Illusion**; they are backward-looking reflections on the past. Finally – not always, but usually – Comic Lyrics lean towards Intensity Patterns, while Tragic Lyrics often mesh best with patterns of Release.

Ultimately, the goal of analysis is to examine the music/lyric relationship and what it means to the audience. A primary question to ask – and the one that is most relevant to this talk today – is whether there is congruity or incongruity between the words and the sounds.

Congruent interaction occurs then the music and lyrics reinforce each other; together they make a clear and unified argument. For example, a school “fight song” played by the marching band before a sporting event tends to be both Intensity Patterns (tubas and brass, cymbals and drums) coupled with Comic Lyrics about impending victory over the opposing team.

Sellnow argues that such congruity creates an effective and persuasive message. In particular, it is compelling for the “in-group,” as it supports their mission. A congruent combination, however, may not appeal to outsiders. That makes sense. If Team A plays their fight song, Team B probably doesn't sing along. This is particularly true if the outside group also happens to be the dominant group; they don't like to be challenged by a consistent but contrary message.

An **Incongruent Interaction** occurs when, at some point or throughout the song, the lyrics and music contradict one another. Obviously, this leads to a greater possibility of listeners misinterpreting or altering the message. *However*, there are some unique benefits as well. Because the outside group is not alienated, as they are with a congruent interaction, this could increase broad-base listener appeal and persuasion, particularly over time. Sellnow states that “sometimes incongruity can successfully persuade listeners to accept a controversial message as legitimate” (2017, p. 178). This is a critical piece of the forthcoming analysis, as we turn to the Top Ten Classic Rock hits from 1968.

Analysis of Top Ten Classic Rock Hits from 1968

Let me start by telling you about my sample set. With such analyses, some scholars might hand-pick those songs they believe are most relevant to their argument. For example, in Goodman, Brandon and Fisher's study of 1968 music, they opted to focus on the Beatles' “Revolution” and Peter, Paul & Mary's performance of Dylan's “Blowin' in the Wind,” as

the lyrics of those songs supported their case. I wanted to start with an externally validated list.

To achieve that, many scholars use the Billboard magazine charts (available at www.billboard.com). I chose to avoid this list, as it represents a homogenized mixture of musical styles as preferred by a mainstream audience. For example, according to Billboard, the top ten hits of 1968 included Herb Albert's easy-listening "This Guy's in Love with You," and tunes from two movie scores: Hugo Montenegro's instrumental version of "The Good, the Bad and the Ugly," from the movie of the same name, and Simon and Garfunkel's folksy "Mrs. Robinson" from the Academy Award nominee "The Graduate." All wonderful songs, but not characteristic of the audience or activities in question. I needed to analyze the rock music of the youth counterculture.

That led to the website Ultimate Classic Rock (www.ultimateclassicrock.com). Part of the Loudwire Network, this music history and news site is owned by Townsquare Media – a radio, entertainment, and digital media and marketing company involved with music distribution and events in small and mid-sized markets across the United States. In their professional opinion, these are the top ten classic rock hits of 1968.

Top Ten Classic Rock Hits of 1968 (www.ultimateclassicrock.com)		
#	Song Title	Performing Artist
10.	<i>Born To Be Wild</i>	Steppenwolf
9.	<i>Waterloo Sunset</i>	The Kinks
8.	<i>Piece of My Heart</i>	Big Brother and the Holding Company (Janis Joplin)
7.	<i>White Room</i>	Cream
6.	<i>Jumpin' Jack Flash</i>	The Rolling Stones
5.	<i>Hey Jude</i>	The Beatles
4.	<i>The Weight</i>	The Band
3.	<i>While My Guitar Gently Weeps</i>	The Beatles
2.	<i>All Along the Watchtower</i>	Jimi Hendrix
1.	<i>Sympathy for the Devil</i>	The Rolling Stones

Table 1: Top Ten Classic Rock Hits of 1968 (www.ultimateclassicrock.com)

One caveat before I begin. I'm going to *discard* one of the songs because it simply doesn't fit. The reasons, I believe, actually bolster my case.

What amazed me when I encountered this list is that, with one exception, these songs are still a regular part of the American music landscape. Fifty years later, they still get radio air time. They regularly show up in movie and television soundtracks. My students and my children know these songs. Most important, when I talk to my contemporaries and members of that generation, these songs elicit positive memories and emotional response. The most common response when I mention a song title? Head nods to an imagined beat, followed by "Oh, yeah."

These songs are timeless, and I believe they achieve that status because, despite their similarities, each has a unique element of that makes them stand out. All of them are stereotypical rock and roll songs; they all are in 4/4 time, with the backbeat on the 2 and 4.

All of them rely on amplified bass and lead guitars, keyboards, and full percussion. Yet, each of them has its own form of Incongruity; a twist, turn, or outright contradiction which, as we've learned from Sellnow, adds to their broad-base appeal and increased acceptance over time. It almost becomes an act of perpetual motion; the longer the song remains popular, the more the incongruent hook adds new listeners and converts them to the message.

Longevity due to incongruity. We'll call that Ingredient One. But, in addition to being timeless, these top hits also share a common moral to their stories, or Ingredient Two. Despite many of them being situated in lyrically Tragic, sometimes dystopian settings, there is always an uplifting and Comic resolution. What my doctoral advisor would call "fetching good out of evil." These songs were the soundtrack that lifted us out of 1968's fearful future and put us back on the path to peace and civility.

Waterloo Sunset. With one exception. I'm going to remove the song "Waterloo Sunset" by the Kinks from the list. Why? It is completely Congruent. It lacks Ingredient One. It is an upbeat pop-rock song with Intensity patterns and matching Comic lyrics. That makes it perfect for the peace-loving flower-child of the sixties but, because it does not deviate in any notable fashion; it lacks the contradiction that would afford it timeless or countercultural status.

The song's writer and Kinks' frontman Ray Davies himself describes it as a romantic, lyrical song, written to honor his older sister's generation. Set in London, the lyrics describe life overlooking the Waterloo bridge:

*As long as I gaze on Waterloo Sunset, I am in paradise.
Every day I look at the world from my window.
Chilly chilly is the evening time, Waterloo sunset's fine.*

Davies actually acknowledges the simplicity yet congruity in his statement, "The lyrics could be better. But they dovetail with the music perfectly" (www.songfacts.com).

A reason this bolsters my argument is that, of the ten songs on the list, this is the only one I've never heard of. I still hear many Kinks' songs on the radio: "Lola," "You Really Got Me," "All Day and All of the Night," and 1982's "Come Dancing." Yes, that's anecdotal evidence, but the song never charted in the U.S. Over the past two months, I have polled many people who were in their teens and 20's in 1968 and have not found anyone (except for a former record promoter) who remembers "Waterloo Sunset." I'm guessing the song is better known here in Brighton? A band from England singing about a bridge that is roughly 90 kilometers north from where I'm standing? But lacking incongruity, and lacking comedy drawn from tragedy, it is not an anthem of the revolution.

For the remaining nine songs I'll use Ingredient One – Incongruity – as the organizational structure. I found that Incongruity manifest itself in three different ways, with three songs under each category. As I discuss each song under its respective heading, I'll also identify Ingredient Two, or the extent to which the song concludes with Comic resolutions.

Musical Manipulations

I label the first three songs **Musical Manipulations**; the Incongruity is created because – while the lyrics are straightforward – something happens in the orchestration, either with instruments or vocalizations, that captures our attention.

Hey Jude. The most subtle is “Hey Jude” by the Beatles. Originally titled “Hey Jules,” Paul McCartney wrote it as a song of encouragement for John Lennon’s son Julian, who was distraught over his parents’ divorce, and his father’s marriage to Yoko Ono.

The incongruity lies in in the build-up of the music; it ends up sounding like a different song than it started.

<p>It begins only with McCartney’s voice, accompanied by soft piano, for the entire first verse.</p>	<p><i>Hey Jude, don’t make it bad Take a sad song and make it better Remember to let her into your heart Then you can start to make it better</i></p>
<p>In verse two, George Harrison comes in on guitar; with Ringo Starr on tambourine.</p>	<p><i>Hey Jude, don’t be afraid You were made to go out and get her</i></p>
<p>Harmony vocals are added in the middle of the verse.</p>	<p><i>The minute you let her under your skin Then you begin to make it</i></p>
<p>Contrary to almost all rock songs, drums don’t enter until almost a full minute in.</p>	<p><i>better</i></p>

Some people recall “Hey Jude” as an acoustic ballad, but, by the end, it’s a full-Intensity rock and roll single with falsetto screaming and a 36-piece orchestra. Perhaps the gradual incongruity is what added to the song’s cross-over appeal. In addition to making this list, “Hey Jude” was also Billboard magazine’s number-one hit for 1968.

More so than any other song in this collection, the Comic conclusion of Ingredient Two is blatantly overt. The message is that things can be sad and cause us to be afraid or feel pain. But we have the power within ourselves to make things better, better, better, better, better.

Piece of My Heart. Though the next song was released by the band Big Brother and the Holding Company, history recalls the lead singer – Janis Joplin – as the artist behind “Piece of My Heart.” The song was originally written for and released as an R&B ballad for Erma Franklin (sister of the legendary Aretha Franklin). Joplin’s version is the one that stands as strong today as it did five decades ago.

Rather than a gradual buildup, the musical incongruity is the abrupt switching back and forth – both with instruments and vocals – between soft release tones and intense driving rock. At two points during the song, Joplin replaces her massive bawdy and gravelly voice with an almost whispered appeal. This draws special attention to the build in her voice as she returns to the Intensity level that led many to call her the Queen of Rock:

(Soft) *You’re out on the streets looking good*
 (Soft) *And baby deep down in your heart I guess you know that it ain’t right*
 (Building) *Never, never, never, never, never, never hear me when I cry at night*
 (Yelling) *Babe, I cry all the time!*
 (Loud) *And each time I tell myself that I, well I can’t stand the pain*
But when you hold me in your arms, I’ll sing it once again
I’ll say come on, come on, come on, come on and take it!

Take another little piece of my heart now, baby

A powerful voice, yes. But the song’s real power is the moral in Ingredient Two. The lyrics reek with relational abuse, for example “*Didn’t I give you nearly everything that a woman possibly can?*,” “*I think I’ve had enough,*” and “*I can’t stand the pain.*” But, instead of falling into Tragic despair, this protagonist finds the strength to persevere. She growls, “*But I’m gonna show you, baby, that a woman can be tough*” and the constant chorus “*Take it! Take another little piece of my heart now, baby,*” is not a song of defeat. It is an act of resistance, telling the abuser to do his worst, and that she will still stand strong.

Sympathy for the Devil. The final example of musical manipulation is Ultimate Classic Rock’s number one choice for 1968 – “Sympathy for the Devil” by the Rolling Stones. In this lyrical summary of historical atrocities, we see not a fluid build or an alternating switch, but two distinct styles happening simultaneously.

<p>The incongruity occurs immediately, as the song begins with intensity instrumentation – conga drums, maracas, and a samba beat.</p>	<p><i>(Orchestration)</i></p>
<p>Seemingly oblivious to beat, Mick Jagger and a melodic piano seem to launch into a ballad.</p>	<p><i>Please allow me to introduce myself, I’m a man of wealth and taste. I’ve been around for a long, long year – Stole many a man’s soul and faith</i></p>
<p>This contradiction forces you to listen to Jagger’s voice. It makes the lyrics about the death of Jesus particularly striking.</p>	<p><i>And I was ‘round when Jesus Christ had His moment of doubt and pain Made damn sure that Pilate washed his hands and sealed his fate</i></p>
<p>As the lyrics turn to Russia, Jagger’s voice and the piano start to pick up.</p>	<p><i>I stuck around St. Petersburg when I saw it was time for a change Killed the czar and his ministers, Anastasia screamed in vain</i></p>
<p>By the time we reach World War II, everything is congruent. Jagger is now using his stadium voice, and all instruments are now at full intensity.</p>	<p><i>I rode a tank. Held a general’s rank. When the blitzkrieg raged and the bodies stank Pleased to meet you. Hope you guess my name.</i></p>

By that time, the audience is hooked and, hopefully, more amenable to the moral of the song. In the next section I’ll be looking at songs whose incongruity lie in puzzles within the lyrics. Some might put “Sympathy for the Devil” in that category, but that would be due only to a knee-jerk misunderstanding of a straightforward message. There are those who mistakenly thought, given the song’s title and the fact that Jagger sings the song in first-person as if he

were the devil, that the Stones were somehow advocating on behalf of Satan. Jagger himself said the song is not about the devil, per se, but about the dark side of man (songfacts.com).

Of all the songs, the most overt reference to the events of 1968 occurs here. In one line he asks, “*Who killed the Kennedy’s?*” and concludes it was “*you and me.*” Therein lies the moral of the story; that *we* are ultimately responsible for the evil *and the good* in the world.

Near the end of the song, the protagonist identifies himself as Lucifer and admits he’s “*in need of some restraint.*” The devil then says: “*So if you meet me have some courtesy. Have some sympathy, and some taste. Use all your well-learned politesse, or I’ll lay your soul to waste.*”

Following the litany of tragic historical examples, there is the comic resolution. When confronted with evil, it is our responsibility to overcome it by being on our best behavior. The power is in our hands.

Lyrical Labyrinths

In these next three songs, the Incongruity ingredient comes due to some type of paradox or shift in the lyrics themselves. These range from subtle inconsistencies in word choices to outright contradictions.

Born to be Wild. The first song, “Born to be Wild” by Steppenwolf, is the most subtle. This song is considered by many to be the quintessential 1960’s song of rebellion. It secured its place in pop culture history as the theme song to the 1969 motorcycle cult-classic “Easy Rider.” In the title sequence, Peter Fonda and Dennis Hopper roll onto the screen with one of the most identifiable drum beats and lyrics in music history:

*Get your motor runnin’ – Head out on the highway
Looking for adventure – And whatever comes our way*

The musical pattern is all Intensity; it is perhaps the hardest rocking song of the collection. The incongruity occurs because the lyrics vacillate between the peace-loving language of the hippie movement, and images of urban industry and warfare. The hard-driving and dark highway motif of the introduction is multiplied through lyrics such as “*I like smoke and lightening / heavy metal thunder*” and “*fire all of your guns at once and explode into space.*” That sounds like a “Mad Max” movie.

However, the song’s writer, Mars Bonfire, originally wrote it as a ballad. That may help explain Ingredient Two, Comic emerging from Tragic, in the smatterings of incongruent upbeat language such as “*Take the world in a love embrace.*” In fact, the entire chorus – which is generally heard as an engine-revving war cry – could actually be the call to a pure and unadulterated life. Listen to it from that perspective, especially on the title line when the Intensity instrumentation actually stops, and there is only the voice calling you to freedom:

*Like a true nature’s child, we were born, born to be wild
We can climb so high, I never wanna die
Born to be wild
Born to be wild*

The Weight. The folksiest song of the bunch is “The Weight,” performed by a band called The Band. Ultimateclassicrock.com describes it as “rustic Americana shrouded in hippie blowback.” It’s a narrative tale of an unnamed protagonist who meets a number of people as he travels down the road. He appears to be traveling on behalf of one Miss Fanny, and his goal is to remove her burden and the burdens of others, and shoulder the weight himself. People remember the song because of its brief but catchy harmonizing chorus:

*Take a load off Fanny, take a load for free
Take a load off Fanny, and you put the load right on me*

Both Ingredients, incongruity and moral, are shrouded in the mystery and meaning of the lyrics. To this day, critics debate whether the song is a Christian Biblical analogy. After all, the song begins with the protagonist entering Nazareth, and is unable to find a place to lay his head. Band members say they’re referring to Nazareth, Pennsylvania, north of Philadelphia – and that the characters are based on real people they know. But other references are made to Moses, Luke, judgment day, and this conversation with his friend Carmen:

*I picked up my bags, I went looking for a place to hide
When I saw old Carmen and the Devil, walking side by side
I said, “Hey, Carmen, c’mon, let’s go downtown”
She said, “I gotta go, but my friend can stick around”*

Like the earlier Rolling Stones’ hit, we see the Devil as a central character; one who is willing to “stick around.” Is this another religious allegory about our behavior and choices? Co-writer Robbie Robinson said the song is about “the impossibility of sainthood,” but that’s it. So the incongruous intrigue about allegory versus actual events keeps us listening for generations, while we continuously absorb the Comic moral about removing the burden from others.

Jumpin’ Jack Flash. The Rolling Stones make the list again with their hit “Jumpin’ Jack Flash.” Here the contradiction in the lyrics are the most overt.

The Ingredient One twist and the salvific Ingredient Two is the stark lyrical contrast between the Tragic Poetic Illusion past of the protagonist and the Comic Dramatic Illusion positive outlook he has toward life. Singer Mick Jagger explains that this song is “about having a hard time and getting out” (www.songfacts.com). Clearly, as this person’s upbringing was a nightmare: “born in a cross-fire hurricane,” “raised by a toothless, bearded hag,” “schooled with a strap right across my back,” “drowned,” “washed up,” “left for dead,” and “crowned with a spike right through my head.” Most people, by this point, would be pretty discouraged. Not Jumpin’ Jack Flash, who bounces back and tells us “it’s a gas”:

*But it’s all right now, in fact, it’s a gas
But it’s all right, I’m Jumpin’ Jack Flash
It’s a gas, gas, gas*

Instrumental Enthymemes

In these final three songs, the Ingredient One incongruity comes not from the lyrics, but in the instrumentation alone. In a traditional persuasive argument, generally a deductive case is made using syllogistic reasoning. However, we can sometimes be more persuasive using enthymematic reasoning; by leaving a major or minor premise unstated, it allows the receiver to fill in the gap and take more ownership of the conclusion. The Sellnows, in their 1993

analysis of John Corigliano's "Symphony No. 1," argue that instrumentation alone can act as an enthymeme; in that case as emotional evocation drawing attention to the AIDS crisis. In other words, just the music void of lyrical content can be an integral and stand-alone piece of the argument.

As with the lyrical labyrinth choices, the incongruity ranges from elusive to overt.

White Room. Most subtle is “White Room” by Cream. In both sound and story, the song is the most metaphorical and surreal; almost bordering on Tragic Release and Poetic Illusion throughout.

The instrumental incongruity is understated, but significant in music history. What stands out, in the background, is guitarist Eric Clapton using a wah-wah pedal (a technique he’d picked up from Jimi Hendrix), to make it sound as if the guitar is actually talking. His playing in this song is ranked as one of the top Wah songs of all time. You can hear the juxtaposition between the almost ominous lyrics and pacing, and the compelling alternative conversation from Clapton’s guitar:

*You said no strings could secure you at the station
Platform ticket, restless diesels, goodbye windows
I walked into such a sad time at the station
As I walked out, felt my own need just beginning*

Ironically, as mysterious as the title sounds, the White Room was just that – the white room that songwriter Pete Brown lived in when he penned the song. He admits that he wrote this at a watershed time in his career; dealing with feelings of hopelessness and pressure as he gave up drugs and alcohol (www.songfacts.com). Once again, the potential tragic setting “*in this place where the sun never shines*” is illuminated by Eric Clapton’s wah-wah pedal. His playing is also Ingredient Two, as every time a lyric seems destined for despair, the instrumental enthymeme ascends. In fact, the final full minute of the five-minute song is simply Clapton’s playing lifting us upward.

While My Guitar Gently Weeps. The Beatles make the list again with “While My Guitar Gently Weeps.” Even though it’s the Beatles, the Ingredients and argument are the same as “White Room.” In other words, the lyrics are a somber reflection on the state of affairs, but an instrumental enthymeme provides the attention-getting contradiction and elevates us to a positive place. And, even though it’s the Beatles, once again it is guitarist and non-Beatle Eric Clapton who takes us there.

In truth, 1968 was a fractious year for the Beatles. The two songs on this list are both from their White Album, produced during a time when the band members were not getting along; basically serving as backing musicians for each other on various songs. It’s said that George Harrison brought Eric Clapton to the recording session, not knowing how the others would react. It turned out to be a positive distraction, and Clapton’s guitar playing made this song the centerpiece of the album.

The setting here is less abstract than “White Room,” though still rather vague. We don’t know who the protagonist is addressing, but he notes throughout the song that that individual has been “*controlled,*” “*sold,*” “*diverted,*” “*perverted,*” and “*inverted.*”

Not all is lost, however. The world keeps on turning.	<i>I look at the world and I notice it's turning While my guitar gently weeps</i>
And we are able to learn from our mistakes.	<i>With every mistake we must surely be learning</i>
While the weeping of the guitar speaks to us in an encouraging and ascending voice.	<i>Still my guitar gently weeps</i> (Guitar solo)

All Along the Watchtower. These last two songs, where the message of resilience is found in the nondiscursive music separate from the discursive lyrics, were merely warm-ups to this most famous example of enthymematic instrumentation – Jimi Hendrix’s “All Along the Watchtower.”

Originally written by and performed as a slow, synchronous, and congruent ballad by Bob Dylan, Hendrix took this song and, with his unparalleled guitar skills, transformed it into one of the most influential hits of the sixties and beyond.

As with the previous examples, we once again have somewhat opaque lyrics. This seems to be the most dystopian of all settings. It’s never clear where this watchtower is located, but a growling wildcat and the howling wind paint an ominous picture. A joker and a thief discuss the vagaries and frustrations of life. On the plus side, they conclude that such is not their fate. As they agree to not talk of such false things, Hendrix’s guitar takes over the conversation and again, through ascendant build, speaks a message of power and survival.

One of my colleagues, David Palmer, also studies music, and he published a fascinating article looking at virtuosity (incredibly skilled action) as a rhetorical act. Looking at nineteenth century violinist Nicola Paganini, Palmer argued that such skill transfigures cultural ideas about expression. He says the truly gifted performer embodies the ideals of their era and evokes a unique sense of <i>communitas</i> (2009). I believe this is also true of guitarist Jimi Hendrix.	<i>So let us stop talkin' falsely now The hour's getting late, hey</i> (Guitar solo)
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Conclusion

This is one of the few times in a speech I can honestly, literally say, “*And on that note*, we can turn to the summary and conclusions.”

In summary, historical factors made 1968 a unique Year of Revolt in contrast to more hippie-centric peace and love messages of the decade. And we’ve seen that music was an effective tool for conveying the message of revolt. Sellnow’s Illusion of Life method provides a framework to examine the dynamic interaction between discursive and nondiscursive elements; an interaction, she claims, which allows the artist to “extend a complex and, perhaps, controversial message while remaining accessible to multiple audiences” (1999, p. 68).

From there, we've identified two Ingredients in the top ten Classic Rock hits of 1968 that, when mixed together, give these songs their longevity and persuasive power. Ingredient One is some form of Incongruity. Whether that comes from Musical Manipulations, Lyrical Labyrinths, or Instrumental Enthymemes, these ten songs each have some type of juxtaposition, contradiction, or hook that grabs our attention and keeps us listening.

Those measures are enhanced by Ingredient Two; the integration of an upbeat, Comic and Dramatic Illusion moral in the face of dark, Tragic, and Poetic Illusion challenges. We faced a fearful future in 1968 and, with these songs to give us strength, we pulled through.

That leads us today. Can we replicate the success of '68's Classic Rock? My answer would be No. And later, Yes.

No, in that the music industry today looks nothing like it did 50 years ago. We've gone from a few record labels producing all the music on limited media like LPs or radio airplay, to a complex blurring of genres, distribution modalities, and audience types. I polled a number of my past and current students, and asked if they thought 2018 had any songs that, 50 years from now, scholars would look back and say, "that was the soundtrack of their dissent." The silence was staggering.

My colleague and music scholar David Palmer did send me a nice email, where he summed it up so much better than could I:

In your and my language, the music arena is now postmodern: few central production-distribution systems, a staggering array of disparate music and music commentary outlets, less genre cohesion and fewer broad audiences, a huge number and array of self-promoting artists, extreme market ephemerality, and so on. For those reasons, and others, there is less of a cohesive generation for which there can be a shared anthem or soundtrack. (personal communication, June 19, 2018)

Goodman, Brandon and Fisher (2017) drew a similar conclusion: "Members of a cause might share a song, but it is difficult to imagine a scenario where music unites the world" (p. 83).

The Revolution Continues

Now, just because there is no unifying music does not mean there is no dissent. The revolution continues. 2018 in the United States saw such things as:

- The second annual Women's March on Washington,
- The explosion of the #Me Too movement condemning sexual harassment and assault,
- Continued activity of the Black Lives Matter movement and its offshoots such as Blue Lives Matter and All Lives Matter,
- Nationwide rallies, such as March For Our Lives, protesting gun violence, and most recently,
- Across the board dissent over the Trump administration's now-rescinded immigration policy which separated parents from their children...to name but a few

Just last month my girlfriend and her daughter attended a Pride rally in Denver, Colorado; corresponding with similar events worldwide including New York, Chicago, and San Francisco. Activism and advocacy is alive and well in the United States and around the world. Taking the words of Dylan Thomas out of context, but not out of intent, we will not go gently into that good night.

In my home state of Colorado, proactive youth have formed an anti-gun violence organization called Never Again. whose mission statement includes “dismantling injustices regarding gun violence and working towards making our schools and communities of color a safer place” (www.neveragainco.com) They’ve been successful in making adjustments to gun laws in Colorado.

So, we have the activism. What we’re missing is the cohesive musical soundtrack. But remember, I said part of my answer to whether or not we can replicate the success of 1968 was Yes. We simply do it with new modalities; all of which are still under the purview of these dual-conference domains: media, communication, film, arts, and humanities.

The lessons from 1968 were the use of attention-getting incongruities and “fetching good out of evil” storylines. We can still do that with social media. And film. And photography. And journalism. And curricula. And lesson plans. And keynote addresses. We must be careful to not let the transitory nature of sound bites, clickbait headlines, disposable memes, and 140 or 280 character Tweets diminish our ability to grab an audience’s attention and tell them a meaningful story with an eventually positive ending.

Classic Rock served its purpose for its time. It is now up to each of us to take the lessons we learned and apply them to the modalities of our era and expertise. The power, as always, is in our hands.

Thank you for providing me this opportunity to speak to you, and I wish for all of you a hope-filled future.

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