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Reflective writing Task

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Reflective Writing on The Stone Roses

The term 'subculture' is thrown around often, but nothing defines subculture like the indie rock giants The Stone Roses. Hardly hitting the ground running, the early years of the band saw little success with a cult following locally and total indifference outside of the north of England (Middles, 2012, Ch.8). This would all change with the release of their self-titled record in 1989. The album catapulted the band into the mainstream and launching a movement that would lay the foundations for the next decade of British music. Artists such as Oasis, Blur, the Libertines and many other leaders in the Britpop era. Despite the overwhelming success of the debut album, the band had fallen apart by the release of their second album and an official follow up to 1994's ironically titled 'Second Coming' has never appeared despite a reunion in 2012 there were only sporadic performances by the band before breaking up again in 2017.

The band has many influences both musically and for the guitarist John Squire, as a painter. Squire shows a strong Jackson Pollock influence in his work both for singles and on the debut album's cover which depicts lemons over a painted background. (Howard, 2019) The piece is referred to as 'Bye Bye Badman' and is a reference to the 1968 student riots in France. (Granzin, 2009) The lemons would be sucked on to protect from CS gas that was used on protestors. Musically the influences are broader however no less apparent, there's a prevalent underlying 1960's influence in a lot of the music on the album especially on softer tracks such as 'Shoot you down' and 'Song for my Sugar Spun Sister.' Additionally, there is the influence of dance music which is most noticeable in the rhythm sections of songs such as 'She bangs the drums' and the 4-minute instrumental outro of 'I am the resurrection.'

One recurring motif on the album is the confrontational nature of some of the lyrics, with 'Elizabeth my Dear' putting an anti-monarchist spin on the classic 'Scarborough Fair', providing a visceral image of the Queen being shot (Power, 2019). There are biblical themes and references to sin all throughout with lyrics such as "I don't have to sell my soul he's already in me," referring to the devil and the sinful nature of craving adoration. There is also a reference to the biblical passage John:11-25-26 in the lyric "I am the Resurrection, and I am the light", in the closing track 'I am the Resurrection'. Included on later re-releases is the single Fool's Gold which tackles political issue critiquing the effect of Thatcher's government on northern England. "The gold road's sure a long road" refers to the long road of a fool's errand to find gold, the gold resembling the mines that were closed by the government.

These themes in their roots are very punk influenced and these ideologies were a big part of being in a group particularly for Ian Brown. Harkening to the influences of the Sex Pistols and particularly the Clash (Middles, 2012, Ch.2). These punk influences have passed down onto my own work, initially instrumentally but over time the presence is more subtle and has been changed as my connection to the album has changed into a more lyrical influence. A further strong influence of this album on my music is through the choice of guitar effects, the wide chorus and dynamic effect choices throughout the song structures is something that I've adapted to fit into various songs and compositions. Outside of the music I was influenced strongly by the fashion of the scene spawned from the album when I first listened to it, wearing lots of baggy clothes and big coats.

Debatably, the peak of this scene was the live performance at Spike Island in 1990. The whole concept of this performance is something that I am very inspired by, hosting a large-scale live event near an abandoned chemical plant as opposed to somewhere more traditional. Not interested in following the example of bands that came before the Roses wanted to be different and pay tribute to the rave culture that was at the heart of their style (Nicolson, 2020). The layered guitars in the closing minute of 'I am the Resurrection' and how the whole piece comes together over the double tracked acoustic arpeggios and a lead part that subtly shines through, it creates a heavenly image that nicely rounds off the album and is a thematic setup for the follow-up album. This finale was really moving to me as I'm often touched by a feeling of finality which is something given across by the track.

The refusal to do what was done before and play at an obscure location has been a big inspiration to me and the rave/dance influences have made their way on to some of my work, often using the standard dance tempo of 140 bpm for many of my songs. A quote from Ian Brown, "We wanted to do something outside of the rock n' roll norm and do it in a venue that hadn't been used for that sort of thing before," highlights this mentality (NME 2020). The sense of finality the album provides in its closing moments is something that has resulted in a lot of thought into song structures, track orderings and the layering on tracks themselves.

The album is heavily influenced by the events of the world in 1989 and the society the band grew up and lived in. In 1984- 1985 there were strikes all over Britain to protest the closing of the mines in Britain, something that had a disastrous economic effect on the North of England (Bannock, 2015). This likely contributes to the bitter tone of the album and the confrontational nature of many of the lyrics, especially on the aforementioned 'fool's gold'. This gave the album a strong resonance among the working class, and many would come to see them as working-class heroes. This level of reverence is saved for few artists in the northern music scene but another group that holds this esteem is Oasis.

Another debut album which had this widespread appeal would be *Definitely Maybe* by Oasis, also a Manchester group the influence The Stone Roses had on Oasis is clear from a visual standpoint; the hair, the clothes and the attitude were all like their predecessors. Their sound however was totally different, the raw punk edge that the Roses had smoothed out was back and everything was as loud and brash as it could possibly be. The album also helped provide a drought to the lack of guitar music with the only relevant competitors of the time being Pulp and Suede (Comaratta, 2014). Liam Gallagher has talked on numerous occasions about the influence the Stone Roses have had on him, and in an interview has described the music as "another dimension" (Trendall, 2012). This strong influence means it is only natural the two albums are so comparable in their impact on youth cultures, with 'Definitely Maybe' being a pivotal release in the Britpop movement.

On reflecting on this album and its influence on me, I can see clearly that it goes past the music on the album and it instead represents a time in my life. Not the time they were around, but the music on the album was a key part of my late teens. Learning about the context of the lemons especially deepened my connection to the punk aspects of the record seeing the political messaging behind both the cover art and the lyrics, deepening my connection outside the music itself and to the album as an art piece. The themes on this album have influenced my work in many subtle ways, be it the political lyrics or the biblical motifs. The confrontational approach is something that was always very enticing about the band.

This research has provided clearer insight on the early years of the band and the struggles they initially went through to make this album, it is something that is reassuring to an aspiring musician. Seeing how on record and in person, the band were unapologetically themselves is inspiring and the dance influences of the album are something that will show through on future projects after this reflective research. The subculture spawned from this album caused an entire other movement in the Britpop scene showing how one group of unassuming, and uncompromising lads can impact British music so greatly.

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