“Heritage rock”: Rock music, representation and heritage discourse

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Abstract

This article seeks to illustrate how “rock” music, as originally defined by an aesthetic dating back to the mid-1960s, is now being culturally and historically repositioned through the application of “heritage rock” discourses. Changing definitions of heritage in an era of cultural fragmentation give rise to new understandings and articulations of cultural heritage. It is in this context that the concept of heritage rock must be placed. Three examples of the heritage rock discourse and practice are considered: Classic Albums Live, the Canterbury Sound website, and Songworks (a small independent record label). Classic Albums Live constitutes an essentially conservative articulation of heritage rock grounded in dominant rock canons; the Canterbury Sound website and Songworks, represent a more DIY (do-it-yourself) approach to the heritage rock project that seeks to reinsert into rock history and rememberings those artists overlooked and ignored in more conservative accounts.

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1. Introduction

This article considers emergent trends that seek to reposition rock music as an aspect of late twentieth century cultural heritage. It is argued that a key factor underlying this trend is a shift in the way that heritage and culture is understood and applied within late modern society. Increasingly informed by “consecrating institutions” (Bourdieu, 1991) associated with the media and cultural industries (Allen and Lincoln, 2004; Schmutz, 2005), notions of heritage and culture are progressively more grounded in the popular cultural forms and products of the recent past. Within this, contemporary popular music forms, and rock in particular, have become significant aspects. The discourse of heritage rock embodies a range of practices spanning the performative, the ideological, and the aesthetic. Broadly speaking, heritage rock projects fall into
two distinctive categories: the first drawing on dominant, critical canons of rock music; the second evading such canons and offering alternative, DIY (do-it-yourself) definitions of rock artistry and achievement.

These distinctive trends are examined and discussed with reference to three specific forms of heritage rock project, Classic Albums Live, the Canterbury Sound website, and small independent record label Songworks (these latter two being examples of what are referred to in this article as DIY preservationism). Classic Albums Live is a relatively recent concept that involves the “faithful” reproduction of selected, critically acclaimed rock albums in a live performance context. The Classic Albums Live concept applies a rhetoric derived directly from classical music – the performance being referred to as a “recital”, the musicians on stage as an “ensemble”, and the songs performed as “works”. Such articulations of the heritage rock discourse adhere to dominant canonical readings of rock mastery and achievement – the albums chosen for replication being those already endorsed by the music industry and cited in mainstream popular music magazines such as *Rolling Stone* and *Mojo* as milestone recordings. DIY preservationism, on the other hand, epitomises an alternative form of heritage rock project. In this case, key agents are often rock music enthusiasts who establish media such as internet fan sites or small, independent record labels to preserve and promote the music of rock musicians who have, for a variety of reasons, fallen into obscurity and thus do not feature in established canons of rock achievement. The activities engaged in by DIY preservationists include the salvaging and re-mastering of old, unreleased music or the production of albums featuring new material by forgotten and obscure artists.

In the case of both Classic Albums Live and DIY preservationism specific empirical examples will be drawn upon to demonstrate the distinctive contributions they make to the heritage rock discourse. As will be illustrated, however, these examples link to broader contexts through which an informed sociological understanding of rock’s positioning within discourses of culture and heritage can be developed.

2. Defining rock

Before proceeding, it is important to establish the definition of rock music as it is applied in the context of this article. During the mid-1960s, “rock” bespoke a new musical sensibility that espoused its own performative, cultural and aesthetic discourses. Central to the rock aesthetic were the notions that rock was “serious” music and that rock performers were “artists” who warranted critical acclaim in a similar way as those more conventionally regarded as artists, for example, painters, writers and poets (Regev, 1994). Such a belief was motivated by the way in which popular music began to shift direction during the mid-1960s. Groups such as the Beach Boys and the Beatles, both of whom had enjoyed unprecedented commercial success producing radio and chart-friendly music, began experimenting with less commercial, more album-orientated music that relied heavily on recording studio technology for its production. The trend set by these and other groups established a pattern whereby the recording studio came to be regarded not merely as a means of capturing an artist’s live sound, but as a creative resource in its own right (Zak, 2001). At the same time, the emergence of new artists such as Jimi Hendrix, the Doors, and the formation of “supergroups”¹ such as Cream placed a new purchase on the importance of musicianship. This came to permeate the culture of rock, becoming a key antecedent in the aestheticisation of rock music and its separation from chart music by musicians.

¹ The term “supergroup” refers to a group formed of already established, and often highly revered, musicians.
journalists and audiences alike (Shuker, 2001). Sociologically speaking, rock and chart music (or in its European context “pop”) also exhibited important cultural distinctions during the late 1960s and early 1970s. As Frith (1981) observes, rock became the signature tune of the hippie counter-culture. Although, as Cleckak (1983) argues, the term counter-culture has been over-generalised, central to its ideology was a counter-hegemonic discourse that pitched the hippies against the mounting technocratic nature of western capitalist society (Roszak, 1969). Rock musicians were regarded as key spokespeople of the counter-cultural movement, a quality that also separated them – in the minds of their audience – from those artists who populated the singles charts and produced songs that were – from the point of view of rock audiences – musically effete and lyrically vacuous. During the early 1970s, the unprecedented success of groups such as Led Zeppelin (Fast, 2001) and the emergence of progressive rock, which blended elements of rock, classical and jazz styles (see Macan, 1997; Martin, 1998), further consolidated this belief in the cultural value of rock (Frith and Horne, 1987).

Certainly, such understandings of rock on the part of critics, journalists, performers and consumers feed into current discourses of heritage rock. That said, however, there are also distinctive differences between “rock as art” and “rock as heritage” discourses. Most importantly, the heritage rock project moves beyond rock’s hitherto accepted context as a “critical moment” in the mid-1960s when discourses of art, ideology and youth radicalism converged. Rather, “heritage rock” embraces another sensibility in which issues of shared generational experience and cultural memory are also of significant importance. Within this, the heritage rock discourse

... enshrines particular rock musicians of the late 1960s and early 1970s not merely as sub-counter-cultural icons, but as key contributors to the essential character of late twentieth century culture per se and an integral aspect of the way in which this era of history is to be remembered, represented and celebrated (Bennett, 2008: 266).

In this sense, those musicians who have created rock music and, by definition, much of the spectacle and aura of the rock phenomenon take their place among other icons and public figures of note – politicians, sports stars, film actors and so on – with the latter group deemed as having made significant contributions to the development of late 20th culture at both the national and global level. In marking the distinctive contribution to culture and heritage legacy is a significant measure. In the case of rock musicians, the music itself comes to be regarded as the primary legacy and, thus, the focus for preservation and consecration (Schmutz, 2005).

The process through which heritage status is conferred on rock music in this way can be directly related to shifts in perceptions of heritage and culture that have occurred over the last twenty years.

3. Redefining heritage

As Atkinson (2008: 381) observes, the concept of heritage is now both highly contested and increasingly multi-layered, giving rise to criticisms among some commentators that “anything and everything from the past is now celebrated uncritically and indiscriminately.” For Atkinson (2008: 381), this recasting of heritage could also be seen to represent a “more far-reaching re-engagement with collective pasts.”

Such shifts in the way heritage is now being rearticulated and applied also have significant ramifications regarding what are understood as key components of heritage. Traditionally speaking, heritage has been used to refer to representations of custom, tradition and place that
coalesce within the cultural memory of a particular national or regional context and fundamentally contribute to the shaping of the latter’s collective identity (see Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1992; McDowell, 2008). As this description suggests, such a definition of heritage was not readily applied to rock music and other aspects of contemporary popular culture – for their mass-produced, commercial and global properties rendered them the antithesis of authentic cultural value as conceived in conventional heritage discourse. Likewise, a number of institutional biases served to block the incorporation of contemporary popular cultural forms into heritage discourse. This is seen, for example, by the way in which state subsidy for the “arts” and “culture” has generally been directed towards more high-brow definitions of the latter. As Shuker (2001: 68) observes: “Popular culture’ is then constructed in opposition to this, as commercial, inauthentic, and so unworthy of government support.” However, such high culture/low culture distinctions are increasingly unsustainable in the context of late modernity, where aspects of “high” and “low”/popular culture frequently merge (Storey, 1993). Indeed, as a growing body of literature attests, critical reviews of a variety of popular cultural forms, including popular music (Van Venrooij and Schmutz, in press), television (Bielby and Bielby, 2004) and literature (Van Rees et al., 1999), routinely draw on high art discourses (Janssen et al., 2008).

Aligned with this shift is the changing nature, and perception, of the term “culture” itself in late modernity. Chaney (2002) has argued that a key impact of mediatisation and the increasing centrality of consumerism in daily life since the end of the Second World War has been a gradual fragmentation of everyday culture and the rise of new forms of lifestyle orientation – grounded in, for example, fashion, music, television and film – that have begun to replace traditional forms of authority – grounded in issues of community and tradition – as key resources through which individuals frame identities in the context of late modernity. This is not to suggest that these previous forms of authority have disappeared altogether. On the contrary, instances of what Williams (1965) refers to as residual culture, for example, language, local dialect, particular mannerisms and so on, continue to influence notions of cultural identity to a fair degree. But these are tempered by more recent, mass-produced cultural forms. Indeed, such is the centrality of mass produced culture in the context of contemporary everyday life that it has effectively become intertwined with residual cultural forms. In naming what they consider to be the key aspects of their cultural milieu, individuals regularly conflate residual and mass cultural elements into seamless narratives of national and regional distinctiveness.

The intertwining of popular culture with broader cultural narratives in this way also gives rise to new understandings of popular culture’s role in the shaping and trajectory of culture. Through its appropriation and use in everyday, vernacular contexts, popular culture ceases to be regarded as something set apart from culture per se (which, as previously argued, must in any case be regarded as an increasingly artificial distinction) but as an integral part of culture, its production and reproduction over time. At the same time, the new significance attached to popular culture, and music in particular, has given rise to new understandings of its “cultural” value. Thus, rather than merely associating the cultural value of music with aspects of locality and national identify (though these issues retain importance; for example, see Bennett, 2000) those who invest in popular music as an aspect of cultural heritage are equally apt to articulate this in trans-local, generationally based terms. They view popular music as something that bonds and shapes individuals through specific instances of cultural memory tied to their collective associations with particular music scenes and associated cultural groups as these manifest themselves at a global level (Bennett, 2006).
4. Rock as heritage

It is in this context that we can begin to understand and examine the significance of the term heritage rock and the various discourses it espouses.

As indicated earlier in this article, rock is now embedded firmly in the cultural memory of an ageing baby-boomer generation. The heritage rock discourse is very much part of the ageing rock audience’s reassessment of rock, not merely as something particular to their youth, but rather as a key element in their collective cultural awareness and a major contributor to their generational identity.

A number of critical antecedents have assisted the baby-boomer generation’s collective reclassification of rock from the music of their youth to a fundamental aspect of late 20th century cultural heritage. Most importantly, this generation’s own representatives, in the fields of television, film, journalism and other cultural industries, have drawn on their institutional power and status to engage in this process. Useful in exploring this issue is the concept of “retrospective cultural consecration” (Allen and Lincoln, 2004; Schmutz, 2005). As Schmutz observes, consecrating institutions increasingly operate across the sphere of contemporary popular culture, conferring critical acclaim, historical importance and cultural value on particular texts. In the context of popular music, print and visual media have performed an incisive role in the process of retrospective cultural consecration. In particular, Rolling Stone magazine, together with more recent “retro” music magazines, such as Mojo, Classic Rock, and Rock and Folk (the latter being the first French language retro music magazine on this topic) have collectively assembled a canon of rock artists and albums on which the heritage rock discourse draws. As Jones (2008: 94) observes, contributing authors to such magazines are “the same authors who write books on individual albums and general histories of rock, and are therefore able to reinforce their values in other secondary material.”

Film and television have also played their part in serving up and reinforcing critical canons through which baby-boomer audiences have come to re-classify rock as an aspect of late 20th century heritage. For example, 1994 saw the release of Woodstock: The Director’s Cut which restored a number of classic Woodstock performances, notably by Canned Heat and the Jefferson Airplane, edited from the original version of the film of the festival released in 1970 (see Bennett, 2004a). Three years later Message to Love, the film of the 1970 Isle of Wight Festival containing among other things the last British performance by Jimi Hendrix, was made commercially available for the first time. In 2002, the 1968 film Monterey Pop, documenting the 1967 Monterey pop festival, was released as box set including 2 h of extra performance footage and two additional short films, also by producer D.A. Pennebaker, Jimi Plays Monterey and Shake! Otis at Monterey (both of which had originally been released in 1986).

During the mid-1990s, the lavishly produced ten-part documentary series Dancing in the Streets focused on the development of post-war popular music from the 1950s through to the early 1990s. Spanning a rich lineage of genres, from be-bop to rap, the series focused on the most critically acclaimed artists of each era in its explication of post-war popular music history. More recently the highly successful BBC series Classic Albums brings together musicians, studio producers and engineers to talk about their contributions to what are critically judged, within established canons of the music press, to be landmark recordings. Rock albums thus far featured in the series include Cream’s Disraeli Gears, the Jimi Hendrix Experience’s Are You

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2 Twenty years earlier, Tony Palmer’s television series All You Need is Love offered its own mapping of 20th century popular music. See also Palmer’s (1976) book of the same name.
Experienced, the Who’s Who’s Next, Pink Floyd’s Dark Side of the Moon and Queen’s A Night At The Opera (all of which were produced between 1967 and 1975 during what is now commonly regarded as the classic era of rock music). The Classic Albums concept itself draws heavily upon the Rolling Stone “500 Greatest Albums” listing, identified by Schmutz (2005) as a critical driver of the retrospective cultural consecration process and production of the rock canon.

The role of print and audio-visual media has been supplemented through the emergence of what could be termed “prestige-granting” bodies and institutions. For example, the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, established in Cleveland, OH in 1983, bolsters the critical acclaim of a select body of rock artists through featured exhibitions and permanent displays. Many of those artists inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame each year first rose to prominence during the rock revolution of the late 1960s. For example, 2009 inductees included British jazz-rock guitarist Jeff Beck whose early career was spent playing with the Yardbirds alongside Jimmy Page.

Finally, the music industry itself has played no small part in supplying the products that feed into and underpin the heritage rock project. Since the late 1980s, a large-scale retro market has blossomed as the music industry has increasingly sought to target the tastes of its highly lucrative ageing baby-boomer consumer base (Frith, 1990; Savage, 1990). This began in earnest during the mid-1980s when CD re-issues of albums previously released on vinyl were instrumental in enabling an economically empowered ageing baby-boomer audience to effectively rediscover its musical past. In addition to re-issuing original albums, the music industry also introduced special anniversary editions of albums, such as Pink Floyd’s Dark Side of the Moon, which often included additional liner notes and bonus tracks. The dawn of the video age in the early 1980s saw the rapid availability of “classic” concert appearances. As VHS gave way to the DVD format, previously unreleased live material from a range of sixties and seventies rock artists, including Jimi Hendrix, The Doors and Led Zeppelin, has been made commercially available for the first time.

Similarly, the year 1995 saw the release of the six-part Beatles Anthology television documentary series which brought the then three surviving members of the Beatles, Paul McCartney, George Harrison and Ringo Starr, together for the first time in over twenty-five years to be interviewed, individually and together, about their time as the Beatles. McCartney, Harrison and Starr also collaborated in the studio, selecting studio out-takes of Beatles’ material for the 3-CD Beatles Anthology collection and working on three new Beatles’ songs utilising “demos” recorded by fellow Beatle John Lennon in New York before his murder in December 1980. All three songs featured Lennon’s original vocal tracks which, using new digital recording and editing techniques, were lifted directly from his home-made demo recordings and set to new arrangements.

Finally, the tribute band phenomenon (see Homan, 2006), also firmly entrenched in the rock canon, has undoubtedly played a significant part in the retrospective consecration of selected rock artists and their most celebrated works. At the same time, a new generation of what could be termed retro-rock bands, notably Australian group Wolfmother, have cited late 1960s and early 1970s rock bands such as Cream, the Jimi Hendrix Experience and Led Zeppelin as key influences on their own music.

The combined influence of each of the above factors in providing a broader cultural, and institutional, context for the realisation of the heritage rock project is highly significant. The

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3 The term “demo”, a short-hand term for demonstration, refers to basic versions of tracks – typically consisting of vocal/guitar or vocal/guitar – often recorded by a song-writer or band member as a means of conveying the essence of a newly composed song to fellow musicians.
remainder of this article focuses on three specific instances of the heritage rock project and their implications for our broader understanding of rock’s re-classification as cultural heritage in late modernity.

5. Classic Albums Live

A significant aspect of the heritage rock discourse is the recent vogue for what is referred to as “Classic Albums Live”, a concept that centres on the faithful reproduction of a specifically chosen album in a live performance setting. Given the influence of factors discussed earlier, notably the CD re-issue market and critical commentaries such as the Classic Albums television series, the “album” has achieved status as a central historical artefact of rock music. According to Jones (2008: 91): “Because of the immediacy and contemporary nature of rock music, albums are often valued if they serve as commentaries or reflections of their time; it is only later that timelessness and longevity become an issue.”

Classic Albums Live is a quintessential example of this legacy. With over 100 dedicated websites detailing concerts, venues and ticketing facilities, Classic Albums Live has quickly become a global phenomenon with a large variety of performances taking place across North America, Europe and the Asia Pacific. The range and variety of albums chosen for performance varies but, as with the Classic Albums television series, they generally feature in the greatest album listings of Rolling Stone, Billboard, and the various retro music magazines noted earlier. Indeed, a survey of existing Classic Albums Live websites, the latter including listings for performances around the world, reveals a clear pattern of choice in featured repertoire; frequently listed albums include Sergeant Peppers Lonely Hearts Club Band (The Beatles, 1967) Abbey Road (The Beatles, 1969), Led Zeppelin IV (Led Zeppelin, 1971) Exile on Mainstreet (The Rolling Stones, 1972), A Night at the Opera (Queen, 1975), Hotel California (The Eagles, 1976), Rumours (Fleetwood Mac, 1977), and The Wall (Pink Floyd, 1979).

In terms of its part in the re-classification of the rock album as an aspect of cultural heritage, Classic Albums Live is significant for a number of reasons. Most importantly, it seeks to recreate a body of work that was never intended to be reproduced “note-for-note, cut-for-cut” in a live context. As noted above, from the late 1960s onwards, rock bands increasingly came to regard the studio as a space in which the limitations of live performance could be transcended (Zak, 2001). This is clearly illustrated, for example, by the ambitious arrangements and myriad special effects featured on the Beatles’ album Sergeant Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band, the proliferation of overdubs heard in the guitar work of Jimmy Page on the studio albums of Led Zeppelin, and the multi-layered vocals that characterise the studio work of Queen. That such studio-created soundscapes could not be reproduced live was considered of little consequence by rock artists and their audience, for whom albums and live performances were considered quite separate musical statements. Indeed, as Toynbee (2006: 74–75) observes, traditionally live “performance [has] hint[ed] at the uncompleted nature of pop – the fact that there tend not to be so much great works as versions, mixes and shifting genres. In short, performance [has] refer[ed] to a creation-in-progress.”

Similarly, the notion of the album as a “body of work” has rarely crossed the threshold from the studio to the live performance context. With the exception of progressive rock acts such as Yes and Genesis, whose albums often followed a concept-format and thus called for accurate live replication (see Macan, 1997), the contents of an album were not generally performed in their entirety on-stage. In the context of live performance, songs from a new album were rather mixed in with existing material to create the optimal effect in terms of aural dynamics, tempo and repertoire.
The Classic Albums Live concept critically revises these established norms of the rock aesthetic, recasting the album as a body of work to be appreciated and understood in its entirety both as a recorded and live artefact. The performative conventions underpinning Classic Albums Live draw directly on the rhetoric of classical music performances. The following example serves to illustrate this point. In November, 2006, the author attended a Classic Albums Live event featuring British hard rock band Led Zeppelin’s second album *Led Zeppelin II* (originally released on the Atlantic label in 1969). Prior to the beginning of the performance, the producer of the event took to the stage to address the audience (an audience incidentally of whom most were males between the approximate ages of 55 and 60, with a small remaining percentage being made up of male university students mostly in their early 20s). The producer described the performance about to take place not as a “concert” but a “recital”; the musicians who would presently take to the stage, he stated, were not a tribute band, who would attempt to capture the visual image of Led Zeppelin, but an ensemble of the best possible musicians brought together specifically for the purpose of recreating the music from the *Led Zeppelin II* album live on-stage. The programme notes supplied for the event extended this rhetoric of classical music performance:

Classic Albums Live...specialises in recreating live...the greatest albums from the 1960s and 1970s...Each performance is faithful to the exact sound of the albums. All of the musicians’ focus is put into the music; they perform the works of Queen, Led Zeppelin, the Beatles, Pink Floyd and more, the same way an orchestra performs the works of Mozart. Every sound, every note, and every guitar and drum solo is performed live (Classic Albums Live, 2006: 13).

Such rhetoric is centrally important to the positioning of the Classic Albums Live concept as a contributing element of the heritage rock discourse. Most obviously, comparing a rock performance to an orchestral performance seeks at some level to lift the former above the standard perception of the rock concert or “gig” by stripping it of the visual gimmickry associated with this mode of performance and recasting it as something to be appreciated purely in terms of its musical content. Similarly, at a semantic level, the substitution of the classically imbued term “works” for the more familiar rock terms “songs” or “tracks” also assists in the task of elevating the recorded output of the featured rock albums to the status of cultural heritage. Here we see a subtle, yet telling, rearticulation of that precise characteristic identified by Toynbee (2006) as separating popular and classical music. Rather than assuming the album to be a work in progress, a collection of “versions” of songs to be re-worked in a live context or covered by other artists, the Classic Albums Live concept insists on an understanding of the album as the master-narrative or “primary text” (Moore, 1993). It also hinges around the manifestation of this understanding as a collective listening experience. Drawing individual fans of the music together, the classic albums concept enshrines the listening experience within a unique and relatively exclusive opportunity to experience a meticulously performed recital of the “great work”.

The Classic Albums Live concept is, of course, not merely a facet of the specially assembled ensemble. Indeed, in recent years, there has been an increasing tendency among original artists to present their own “classic album” shows, notable examples being Brian Wilson’s *Pet Sounds* tour and Lou Reed’s live performance of *Berlin*. Similarly, American cult band Sparks have recently undertaken a tour on which each of their existing twenty-one studio albums were performed live on consecutive nights (Ling, 2009). In terms of attention to detail in reproducing the sound of an album in a live context, there is little distinction between classic albums performances by the original artist and the ensemble. Where the critical distinction does lie, is in the transference of the aura (Benjamin, 1973) from performer/text to text itself. In the case of
classic albums performances by the original artists, the aura of the artist as a live spectacle remains integral to a critical understanding and respect for the work performed. In the case of an ensemble performance, the aura of the artist is experienced exclusively through the medium of the music. There are clear parallels with other aspects of cultural heritage where the aura of the creator resides in the artefact, the latter carrying forward the essence of the creator well beyond his or her natural lifetime. Here again, the rhetoric of classical performance is centrally important. Disregarding the theatrics of the rock performance and offering the audience instead an ensemble of musicians observing a quasi-classical performance ethic of faithful reproduction (which in some cases extends to reading from music scores), the Classic Albums Live concept focuses the attention of the audience squarely on the musical text and the mastery of the musicians in interpreting that text.

6. Heritage acts and DIY preservationism

The Classic Albums Live concept represents one initiative through which selected examples of late 1960s and early 1970s rock music are symbolically lifted above the mass cultural context of their production, represented and discursively re-worked as an aspect of late twentieth century cultural heritage. Ultimately, however, Classic Albums Live constitutes an essentially conservative articulation of the heritage rock discourse. As noted previously, the groups and albums chosen for the recital format are entirely consistent with those generally acknowledged by rock critics, together with the readers’ polls of mainstream popular music magazines such as Rolling Stone and Mojo, as having made a major contribution to the field of rock. As discussed above, however, if contemporary notions of heritage and culture are increasingly multi-layered and open to interpretation, they are also increasingly contested. A multiplicity of voices now engage in debates around definitions of history, culture and heritage that previously were confined to realm of intellectuals and experts. The mediatisation of society, characterised by increasing access to cultural products, texts and images, has functioned to undermine such exclusive forms of intellectual authority.

As with other spheres of mass mediated popular culture, a central aspect of rock music fandom is the knowledge and expertise that individuals frequently bring to bear when defining, justifying and legitimising their particular tastes (Bennett, 2002, 2004b). Within this, debates concerning the authenticity, artistic merit and historical significance of particular rock groups and solo artists play a major part. Thus, as Hayes (2006) observes, although dominant canonical discourses, notably those created by leading publications such as Rolling Stone, carry considerable weight in marking out the cultural terrain of rock and identifying key historical moments that are said to define it, this is offset by counter-discourses generated by groups of fans themselves. A pertinent example of this is seen among vinyl record collectors for whom an understanding of rock history is often created through an appreciation of precisely those artists who, for whatever reason, do not feature in the ratings lists of Rolling Stone and comparable magazines such as Mojo and Classic Rock.

Inevitably, such contestation of accepted rock histories is also present within particular expressions of the heritage rock discourse. Thus, alongside more conservative expressions of heritage rock, there exist alternative discourses within which the key to representing rock as heritage is the reassessment and critical re-working of some of the more “taken-for-granted” aspects of rock’s historical development. Eschewing the “classic albums” concept of heritage rock, such alternative discourses strive to bring more obscure, often unacknowledged, artists to public attention. These new avenues for individual involvement in determining moments of
progress, achievement and innovation in rock, and for understanding the latter as integral to the character and flow of contemporary cultural history, have also led to a proliferation of self-fashioned, DIY (do-it-yourself) attempts to preserve and cherish particular artefacts of rock. Such DIY preservationists concern themselves with representing the roots of the rock phenomenon, digging below accepted terrains of rock to expose those artists whose contribution to the field of rock have been lost or forgotten.

An interesting example is seen in the “Canterbury Sound”. Originally coined in the late 1960s by music journalists to describe a loose affiliation of musicians with Canterbury connections, such as Robert Wyatt and Kevin Ayers, during the mid-1990s, fans began to reassess the term “Canterbury Sound” via access to the internet and other digital media resources. Calyx, a dedicated Canterbury Sound website, was established in 1995 and quickly became a space for online discussions about the nature and extent of Canterbury music. Such renewed interest in the Canterbury Sound led one group of fans to participate in another significant DIY preservationist project, assembling a collection of rare, and generally unknown, early recordings by the Wilde Flowers, a local Canterbury-based group whose members went on to form early progressive rock groups such as Soft Machine and Caravan, together with collaborations between members of the Wilde Flowers and other local musicians. These recordings were subsequently released in a 4-volume series entitled “The Canterburied Sounds” (Bennett, 2002, 2004b). As research on internet fan sites demonstrates, such instances of DIY preservation are becoming increasingly common, to the extent that they can no longer be regarded merely as isolated incidents of fan innovation, but they constitute a globally connected informal network of activity orientated towards a re-writing of contemporary popular music history (for other examples, see Kibby, 2000; Lee and Peterson, 2004). In previous work (see Bennett, 2002), I have drawn attention to the significance of the Canterbury Sound as a highly mythologised musical moment whose history has been re-written on several occasions as fans and enthusiasts seek to impose their own canonical template on a scene that was, from the outset, highly contested not only by music journalists but by the musicians themselves. These more recent canonical representations of Canterbury Sound fans exemplify an inherently DIY preservationist sensibility. Armed with a knowledge gleaned from various journalistic and media accounts concerning the essential ingredients of what constitutes a music scene, fans apply their own creative license in constructing the city of Canterbury as a bonafide setting for what they consider a quintessential 1960s rock scene. In doing so, such enthusiasts are actively engaged in the production of an alternative history, bringing to bear their own local knowledge of a particular urban space, melding this together with series of aesthetic judgements pertaining to issues of musical and cultural value.

Another important medium through which DIY preservationists are able to create alternative discourses of heritage rock discourses is the establishment of small, independent record labels. Again, such an activity allows DIY preservationists to apply their own conventions of taste and distinction in rescuing particular songs, albums and artists from obscurity and reinserting them into the rock historical context. This particular form of DIY preservationism has a long and established history, extending well back into the 20th century and the emergence of blues and jazz recordings. Similarly, throughout the 1970s and 1980s, fans of the American garage band scene of the 1960s re-issued what were considered classic examples of this still relatively obscure genre. In the sphere of rock too, an increasing number of small labels, established and operated by fans, work to preserve and enshrine particular artists and albums facing the threat of eradication from “official” histories of rock. An illustrative case in point here is Songworks – a small, UK-based independent record label that specialises in the re-issuing of deleted albums and
the issuing of previously unreleased material by less well-known artists associated with the progressive, folk and jazz-rock fusion styles of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Speaking in an aesthetic language more readily associated with punk and alternative record labels than one associated with rock music, Mike, the founder and head of Songworks, explained the rational behind his decision to establish the label:

The basic history of Songworks is that...it was the late ‘80s and early ‘90s, and the accountants had taken over all the major record companies. So it was all about bean counting essentially. The only way you got people to listen to demos in those days was to tell them that it cost 50 grand per demo, and then it suddenly meant something. Art itself had lost its actual value as art and it was just measured by its cost y’know...So the music which I liked, which was a type progressive rock, was few and far between and nobody was doing anything. Nobody was really that interested. CD was still a little bit in its infancy, all the obvious CDs had been reissued like *Dark Side of the Moon*, y’know, things like that or the Beatles, or Genesis. But nobody had really got into the swing of putting out unreleased things, all that sort of stuff. Nobody was really doing reissues or actually speaking to these more heritage type acts at all, y’ know. And eh, we managed to unearth a few through my Gong connections and a few Van Der Graaf [Generator] people. And essentially that was the start of Songworks.

The definition of heritage rock articulated here is significantly different from that espoused by the more populist representations reflected in the Classic Albums Live concept. In the case of progressive rock, with which Mike is primarily concerned here, populist accounts generally identify its origins in the psychedelia of the mid-1960s, quickly progressing through the heavily amplified rock of groups such as Cream and the Jimi Hendrix Experience to groups such as Yes, Genesis and Emerson Lake and Palmer. Although each of the latter groups were English in origin, their popularity, and consolidation of the progressive rock label, came through significant commercial success in the US and in a broader global context. In his book *The Music’s All That Matters*, Stump (1997) revisits and re-evaluates progressive rock, painting in the process a far more intricate and localised picture of the genre’s origins. In doing so, Stump once again locates progressive rock as an “English” genre with roots in the jazz-rock and experimental avant garde music of artist such as Gong and Van Der Graaf Generator. Remaining very much “underground”, such artists were, according to Stump, nevertheless a critical element in the emergence of progressive rock and a pivotal part of its history and heritage.

An analogous reading of progressive rock’s origins is evident in Mike’s account of the origins of Songworks. Moreover, according to Mike, despite their status as “heritage acts”, within the lineage of progressive rock, the most crucial artefact of groups such as Gong and Van Der Graaf Generator – their recorded music – was threatened with eradication in the wake of the digital era. Thus as Mike explains, in their marketing of progressive rock albums as CD re-issues, major record labels drew directly on canonical artists such as Pink Floyd and Genesis rather than formative, less commercial progressive rock artists. Such a practice, he alludes, threatened to erase from the cultural memory of the consumer a crucial aspect of progressive rock’s musical

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4 Access to Songworks was gained during a larger study of the aesthetic practices engaged in by ageing audiences for popular music genres such as rock, punk and dance music. Data for this study were generated via a qualitative research methodology, including fieldwork observations and one-to-one, semi-structured interviews. The interview extracts included in this article are drawn from 45 min telephone interview conducted with Mike, the founder and head of the Songworks label in March, 2004.
and cultural development on its pathway to critical acclaim. Indeed, according to Mike, the very fact of such hyper-commodification distorts the representation of rock history – highlighting the contribution of the few but dismissing the equally important work of the many. The term “heritage act”, then, as defined in this context, is designed to address the commercial bias of the major record labels by attempting to reposition hidden or forgotten artists and their music back into the frame of rock historical consciousness. The concept of heritage, when applied in the rhetorical context of national culture and identity, highlights aspects of tradition, achievement and perceived distinctiveness (and the enhanced need to preserve the latter in the face of encroaching global cultural trends). Similarly, the notion of the “heritage act” works on the principle that it is often those acts who have worked, for whatever reason, below the radar of commercial success who give rock music its true distinctiveness, integrity and heritage status over those that have been canonised within more mainstream notions of rock.

In the context of Songworks, however, the perception of the heritage act as a historical and cultural artefact went beyond the level of the purely discursive; it also informed the hands-on technical work carried out on the music released by the label. In discussing this aspect of Songworks, Mike articulated a deeply invested DIY preservationist sensibility, which became accentuated when discussing the interventionist possibilities afforded by the contemporary recording studio, digital technology and the CD. During the mid-1980s, when CD-re-issues of albums first recorded during the 1960s and 1970s first began to appear, material re-issued on CD was often re-mixed. In some cases elements of songs that had been edited out of the original recordings were re-added and “bonus” tracks recorded during the original sessions for an album included. In relation to this, Mike was at pains to point out that albums re-issued by Songworks were re-mastered but not re-mixed. Thus, a further dimension of Mike’s particular articulation of the heritage rock discourse became apparent, one in which he interestingly compares his own practices of caring for and respecting the creative decisions of the original artist with those informing the care of and respect for more conventionally acknowledged aspects of heritage and culture. This is clearly evident in the following interview extract:

A.B.: Do you remix albums before putting them onto CD?

Mike: We re-master, we don’t remix... I think remixing is tampering with history. It’s like nipping down to the Sistine Chapel and changing the colour scheme of it, y’know, as opposed to just cleaning it up.

A.B.: So you never do anything like that... even when the sound quality could be better by...

M: Well that’s re-mastering, not re-mixing. You’re asking me about two different things. That’s why [I use] the analogy with nipping down the Sistine Chapel. If you clean it up you can see it better, that would be like re-mastering. But you don’t change the colour scheme, ‘cause that would be like re-mixing.

This preservationist discourse was also employed as a means of protecting the sanctity of recordings, even when their quality was clearly well below that of material usually made available for public purchase and consumption. For Mike, in such cases the physical condition of a recording was superseded by its sheer historical significance – something which again related back to a desire to engage with and re-address the more popular history of rock as conveyed through its mainstream representation. In justifying Songwork’s decision to work with and
release such material, Mike again employed an analogical rhetoric that drew comparisons with more conventional understandings of history, culture and heritage. Thus, he explained:

...there’s a couple of tracks by Soft Machine which we released which eh, in fairness, they’re completely abysmal quality, they’re terrible quality. But those are the only recordings which exist anywhere which ha[ve] got Andy Summers⁵ on them. So, historically they’re [of] value y’know. At the risk of completely going over the top, you could say “well”, y’know, ‘you could[n’t] chuck the Dead Sea Scrolls away [just] because they’re knackered”.

In many ways, the type of “heritage act” discourse articulated above amounts to a form of musical archaeology, working over the rock cultural terrain and resurrecting those parts of its history which have, in many cases, become lost in time. Technologically speaking, such excavations of rock’s forgotten history are likely to become more abundant as further advances in digital recording and sound restoration are made. As such, DIY rock preservationism may well expand to include increasingly obscure, locally specific artists whose “rediscovery” is inherently linked to more regional celebrations of heritage and identity. In any event, and as the above examples illustrate, the cultural consecration (Schmutz, 2005) of rock music through discourses of heritage is increasingly widespread and subject to a plurality of articulations. The concluding section of this article considers the broader significance of the heritage rock discourse as a means of understanding the re-classification of rock music as an aspect of late 20th cultural heritage.

7. Conclusion: heritage rock and cultural memory

The purpose of this article has been to illustrate, with reference to specific examples, how “rock” music, as originally defined by an aesthetic dating back to the mid-1960s, is now being culturally and historically repositioned through the application of heritage discourses. Integral to the latter is a particular generational structure of feeling, shared by ageing baby boomers and endorsed by those prestige awarding institutions in which this generation has a significant stake. Through such institutions rock is represented as musical genre and cultural form worthy of what Schmutz (2005) refers to as cultural consecration. As such, the importance of rock comes to be regarded by the baby-boomer audience as something that surpasses the connection with youth, and youthhood memories. Rather, in the collective cultural memory of the ageing baby-boomer generation, the rock music of the late 1960s and early 1970s is understood as something that has both fundamentally influenced and critically changed the trajectory of western culture in the late 20th century. In terms of their contribution to the socio-cultural fabric of this period, rock artists and their music take on a stature similar to that of other leading figure heads, such as politicians and sporting celebrities. With the fullness of time, and increasing age of many rock icons, their recorded work is becoming a dominant artefact and focus for cultural consecration.

It could, of course, be argued that critical in rock’s re-inscription as an aspect of cultural heritage in this way is the cultural hegemony of the baby-boomer generation per se. As one of the first generations to come of age in a fully mediatised, fully consumerised society, and in a period of rapid economic and educational expansion, an acquired social, cultural and economic capital are clearly key to the baby boomer’s ability to assert the significance of their generational experience within the plurality of competing heritage discourses alluded to by Atkinson (2005).

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⁵ Better known for his work with British post-punk band the Police, guitarist Andy Summers was a member of Soft Machine for several months in 1968, appearing live with the group but not recording with them.
However, as the contrasting examples of the heritage rock discourse presented in this article attest, when filtered through the prism of cultural memory, the cultural hegemony of the baby-boomer generation appears inherently complex and multiply articulated. At one level a collective remembering and celebration of rock orientates around the articulation of an elitist, quasi-high art discourse that relies on canonical representations of rock music and creative achievement. At a second level, however, such articulations are disputed by a counter-discourse that underscores an altogether different series of collective memories through which the historical and cultural significance of rock – and perceived key texts of the rock genre – are represented and preserved as aspects of cultural heritage. Although similar in its understanding of rock as a critical aspect of contemporary cultural heritage, it is precisely those artists and recordings whose contributions have become lost in canonical readings of rock that are celebrated and held up as aspects of cultural heritage. In many respects then, heritage rock discourses provide clear evidence in support of Atkinson’s (2008) observations concerning the highly pluralistic – and contested – nature of heritage in late modernity. If, as Atkinson argues, heritage is increasingly fragmented and multiply articulated, then heritage rock as an aspect of such new heritage formations is equally complex and multi-faceted.

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