

Introduction

Personal and Disciplinary Reflections

I glimpsed the first manifestations of glam rock while living in London in 1971. I was very taken with T. Rex's single "Get It On (Bang a Gong)" and bought their album *Electric Warrior* as soon as it appeared; well over thirty years later, it remains one of my favorite records. Back in the United States, I was introduced to the work of David Bowie in 1973 but did not really develop an appreciation of it until a year or two later, when I became a fan. Working in radio in the early 1970s, I had the opportunity to listen to every recording of music that was released; it was through this association that I first became aware of Slade, Gary Glitter, and Suzi Quatro, though they did not rank among my favorite performers at the time.

These fragments of musical autobiography may suggest, at first blush, that I am not necessarily the best person to write a book about glam rock. Although I was aware of it from its early stages and enthusiastic about certain of its manifestations, I was not particularly engaged by it as a genre. Then, as now, my favorite genres of rock music were psychedelic rock and blues-rock, precisely the musical precedents against which glam rockers reacted. After devoting more than five years to researching, writing, and talking about glam rock, I have come to see my status as a relative outsider as an advantage. For one thing, it meant that the research was a process of discovery: rather than remapping familiar territory, I explored terrain that was relatively unknown to me. As a nonfan with few existing prejudices or allegiances, I was able to assess the material in a fairly "objective" way. I no longer consider myself an outsider, however. Rather than writing a book about a genre of music of which I was a fan, I became a fan by writing the book.

My interest in writing about rock evolved in part from a desire to bring together my vocation as a performance studies scholar and my avocational interests as a record collector and popular music fan. I found my first opportunity to do so when working on the book *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (1999): the relationship of live musical performance to sound recordings and music videos became one of three paradigmatic instances of the general relationship between live and mediatized performance I discussed there (the other two were the relationship between theater and television and that between live courtroom proceedings and videotape trials). I became better acquainted through that project with writings on rock and popular music, primarily from the realm of cultural studies and media studies. I thus became aware of the centrality of concepts of authenticity to rock culture, an issue I wanted to explore further and to which I return here as a central theme.

Reading the academic discourse on rock music emerging from cultural studies, I was struck by the way that field, perhaps because of its roots in sociology and ethnography, generally emphasizes the reception of popular music much more than the performance behavior of musicians. Although scholars in communications and cultural studies often make excellent observations concerning specific genres of rock and pop music and their audiences, their remarks on performance are generally impressionistic and synoptic. Most of the work in cultural studies of popular music that focuses on production examines the sociological, institutional, and policy contexts in which popular music is made, not the immediate context of the work of the artists who make it. In contrast, my stance here is unabashedly performer-centered: I am interested primarily in finding ways of discussing what popular musicians do *as performers*—the meanings they create through their performances and the means they use to create them. Although I will not ignore the reception of these performances (particularly in the conclusion, where I discuss the social effects of glam rock), I am less concerned with the audience than with the performers themselves.

If cultural and media studies of popular music have neglected performance, performance studies has been remiss in its general neglect of musical performances. The principal journals in the field seldom publish articles about music as performance or musicians as performers, and only a small (but growing) number of papers on

these topics are presented at academic conferences. At a common-sense level, the absence of music from the array of subjects considered by performance scholars seems odd—musicians are performers, after all, and it would be eminently reasonable to discuss them as such. I cannot explain fully the neglect of musical performances by performance studies, but I suspect that a partial explanation lies in the genealogy of the field. The original paradigm for performance studies resulted from a synthesis of theater studies with aspects of anthropology, sociology, and oral interpretation.¹ Theater studies generally stakes out its territory in such a way as to exclude music, and scholars in performance studies seem unfortunately to have inherited this unwillingness to deal with musical forms. Even opera, a musical form that obviously avails itself of the same means of expression as the theater, is traditionally omitted from theater historical discourse. Vera Mowry Roberts, with whom I studied theater history, argues in her introductory textbook that the history of opera and the history of theater are separate narratives because “the predominant force in opera was the music rather than the words” and “the composer . . . is the focus of attention in opera” (108). For Roberts, the fact that opera is driven by music rather than drama, by composers rather than playwrights, places it outside the realm of theater history.

The approach I have taken here in an effort to sketch what performance studies might bring to the table in discussing musical performances is to apply the concept of performance analysis to popular music. While theater scholars have long described and analyzed performances, the idea that performance analysis constitutes an identifiable—though not strictly defined—approach (as distinct from theater criticism, say) is of relatively recent vintage. Performance analysis differs from the transcription methods of ethnomusicologists and the notation methods of dance scholars in the sense that it is as much interpretive as descriptive and is not organized around a specific technical vocabulary. Whereas dance notation may be of equal value to analysts and performers, performance analysis is understood to be specifically from the spectator’s point of view. Although performance analysis is a semiotic enterprise at heart, theater scholars’ flirtation with the technical vocabulary of

1. For a discussion of both the evolution of performance studies and the status of concepts of performance and performativity in a variety of disciplines, see Auslander, “General Introduction.”

semiotics, popular during the 1970s, has largely dissipated in favor of a less “scientific,” more eclectic set of approaches drawn from reception theory, phenomenology, cultural anthropology, sociology, feminist theory, cultural and literary theory, and other theoretical orientations.²

Central to my understanding of performance analysis as applied to popular music is the concept of *persona*, which I have used before in discussing performance art and stand-up comedy.³ Following Simon Frith,⁴ I see the performer in popular music as defined by three layers: the real person (the performer as human being), the performance persona (the performer’s self-presentation), and the character (a figure portrayed in a song text).⁵ All three layers may be active simultaneously in a given musical performance. For example, when Kelly Clarkson, the winner of the 2002 *American Idol* television singing competition, sang a duet on television with country singer Reba McEntyre, they performed a

2. Patrice Pavis charts the rise and fall of theatrical semiotics as well as the current eclecticism in performance analysis (13–30). This list of contributing disciplines draws on Pavis and the authors represented in Colin Counsell and Laurie Wolf’s anthology, *Performance Analysis*.

3. I find the term *persona* useful as a way of describing a performed presence that is neither a fictional character nor equivalent to the performer’s “real” identity. In earlier work, I have used it as a heuristic in discussions of performance art (Auslander, *Presence* 57–81), experimental theater, and stand-up comedy (Auslander, *From Acting* 39–45, 108–25).

4. Frith proposes that we hear pop singers as “personally expressive,” that is, as singing in their own persons, from their own experience. But two other layers are imposed on that one because popular musicians are “involved in a process of *double enactment*: they enact both a star personality (their image) and a song personality, the role that each lyric requires, and the pop star’s art is to keep both acts in play at once” (*Performing Rites* 186, 212). Frith uses the term *persona* but only in reference to performance artists who “took themselves and their bodies as the objects or sites of narrative and feeling” (205) not in reference to popular musicians.

5. David Graver proposes that actors’ presence onstage can be broken down into at least seven varieties, two of which (character and personage) overlap my categories here. Graver’s “personage” is basically equivalent to my “persona”; Graver provides an eloquent definition: “personage . . . is not the real person . . . behind the character. Personage status is not a foundational reality but simply another way of representing oneself or, rather, a way of representing oneself within a particular discursive domain” (164). Using Graver’s vocabulary, I am suggesting here that the musical performer’s persona is the way the performer represents him- or herself within the discursive domain of musical performance.

song in which they played the roles of women competing for the affection of the same man. In addition to these characters, however, they also portrayed musical personae of the seasoned veteran singer and her young acolyte (and perhaps future competitor); these personae were delineated through the same performance as the characters in the song but were independent of those characters—the singers could have performed their personae regardless of what song they chose.⁶ The presence of the performers as real people was implied through Clarkson's televised announcement that she had always idolized McIntyre and had therefore chosen her as a duet partner when she was in the position to do so by virtue of having won the competition. Whether true or not, this appeal to personal experience was layered into the performance alongside the two women's performance personae as seasoned veteran and young up-and-comer and their characters as romantic rivals; all three levels of personification contributed to the performance's meaning for the audience.

That these three signified presences admittedly are often difficult to distinguish from one another does not diminish their heuristic value. The demarcation line between real person and persona is always ambiguous in performance, for, as Richard Schechner points out, performance is always a matter of the performers not being themselves but also not not being themselves ("Performers" 88). This logic of the double negative is represented in one way by the professional names sometimes used by pop music performers, names that initially designate their personae but are later generalized to the real people. David Jones renamed himself David Bowie; David Bowie is not David Jones, yet he also is not not David Jones, as suggested by the fact that the name David Bowie belongs now to both the real person and the performance persona. The real person is the dimension of performance to which the audience has the least direct access, since the audience generally infers what performers are like as real people from their performance personae and the characters they portray. Public appearances offstage do not give

6. Graver argues that in the theater, the character's presence is dominant over the actor's presence: "We do not really see the character in a drama in addition to the actor representing that character; rather, we see the actor as a character within drama's universe of discourse" (158). I argue that this priority is reversed in the performance of popular music, that we usually perceive the performer primarily in the guise of his or her persona, with character emerging as a distinctly secondary effect.

reliable access to the performer as a real person since it is quite likely that interviews and even casual public appearances are manifestations of the performer's persona rather than the real person. Glam rockers like Bowie and Quatro consistently extended their onstage personae to public venues offstage.

I believe that this general schema can be applied to musical performers of all kinds: jazz musicians and symphony conductors present personae just as popular musicians do. I ultimately chose glam rock as a subject partly because its overt and self-conscious theatricality presents clear and dramatic cases of the creation and presentation of performance personae by popular musicians. I have focused here on both the aural and the visual means through which glam rockers asserted their personae, with particular emphasis on voice, costuming, and movement. Glam rock also cries out for discussion in terms of compelling issues in performance studies, particularly the performance of self, gender identity, and sexual identity. All of these are crucial to my analysis here and reveal important points of intersection between music and performance studies. In these discussions, I have drawn on prominent theorists of identity and gender, including Judith Butler, Judith Halberstam, and Erving Goffman. The sociocultural "gendering" of musical instruments and how instruments contribute to the gender image of a performance persona, which is a theme to which I return regularly here, is one example of an analytical trope that intersects music and performance studies.

The other main reason behind my choice of glam rock is its fascinating historical position. As someone who came of age during the Vietnam War, I have long been intrigued by the era known as "The Sixties" and its aftermath. Glam rock is a culturally significant part of that transition, part of the story of how "The Sixties" became "The Seventies." Arguably, glam rock was the first fully developed post-countercultural genre of rock music. Looking at how it was performed by contrast with the performance conventions of the psychedelic rock closely associated with the hippie counterculture can tell us a great deal about the shifts in aesthetic, political, social, and cultural priorities that unfolded at this important moment. In many ways, psychedelic rock and glam rock are polar opposites. Whereas psychedelic rock emphasized musical virtuosity and seriousness, glam rock emphasized accessibility and fun. If psychedelic rock was suspicious of spectacle and theatricality, glam rock celebrated those aspects of performance. Whereas

psychedelic rock, as a countercultural form, always had an uneasy relationship to the market through which it was disseminated, glam embraced the concept of the hit single. If psychedelic rock addressed its audience as a collective whose actions could ultimately transform global politics, glam rock addressed its audience as individuals with the power to transform only themselves. All of these differences, and many others, are enacted in the respective styles of performance associated with psychedelic rock and glam rock. In chapter 1, I develop a stylistic model of the performance of psychedelic rock against which to gauge both certain maverick performers of the 1960s and the glam rockers who followed them. The relationship between psychedelic rock and glam rock is finally not one of simple opposition but dialectical; several of the most important glam rockers, including Bolan and Bowie, were active on the underground rock scene before going glam.

Although I have sought to describe the development of glam rock (largely in chapter 2) and to place it in historical, social, and artistic context, this book is intended primarily as a work of performance analysis informed by theory rather than a history or sociology of glam rock. There are two serviceable histories available: Barney Hoskyns's well-informed, journalistic *Glam! Bolan, Bowie and the Glitter Revolution*, which provides a very helpful account of the development of glam in both its American and British versions, and Van Cagle's more academic treatise *Reconstructing Pop/Subculture: Art, Rock, and Andy Warhol*, which deals primarily with the American side of the equation. Both authors provide good insights into the development of glam rock, and I have not attempted to duplicate their work. This book also should not be taken to be a comprehensive guide to glam rock as a musical genre. For a useful book of that kind, I would direct readers to Dave Thompson's *20th Century Rock and Roll: Glam Rock*, a comprehensive guide aimed at an audience of record collectors.

Although my narrative here is structured in a roughly chronological way, it is organized more as criticism than as history. Opting for depth over breadth, I discuss only a fraction of glam rockers here, focusing on the British performers and discussing the Americans primarily as context, but I have tried to treat their performances in detail. My selection of subjects was governed by their importance to glam rock (in my view, for instance, one cannot write on glam without discussing both Bolan and Bowie, without both of whom the genre probably would not have developed as it

did), by the critical and interpretive issues their performances raise, and by their intrinsic interest as performers. I have also tried to include performers with differing relationships to glam rock. Whereas Bolan and Bowie were glam innovators who initiated and consolidated the style and its basic performance strategies, Bryan Ferry and Roy Wood were second-wave glam rockers who put their own particular twists on a set of existing strategies. Suzi Quatro, my subject in chapter 6, has the distinction of being the only canonical female glam rocker. The mere fact of her being a woman necessitates a different approach, including consideration of the general status of female performers in rock.

In examining performances of glam rock, I have drawn on a range of primary materials, including sound recordings, films of live performances, television performances, and interviews. Because glam rock predates MTV, most of the television performances are concert-like presentations rather than music videos, though many are lip-synched. Although lip-synched television performances may not convey much musical information, they do provide a sense of the kinds of visual performance and the performance persona the artist chose to present and are therefore of great value to the performance analyst.

I aspire with this book to make a bridge between disciplines that really ought to be in conversation with one another and to advocate an approach to talking about popular musicians as performers. However, if I succeed only in drawing renewed attention to a fascinating moment in the cultural history of rock and a body of pleasurable music that has been a significant presence in my life these past five years, I will have accomplished something eminently worthwhile.