WEEKEND *TUNES*

CULTURE

The problem with the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame

// BY CIELO GAZARD



ILLUSTRATION BY LUCAS CASTILLO-WEST

The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame has a problem. Depending on who you ask, the problem can be a variety of things. The Rock Hall's bias toward acts in the English speaking world. Its inclusion of pop and hip-hop musicians in more recent years. The lack of women and people of color inducted, or the major rock acts continually snubbed year after year. While some of these arguments are genuine and valid critiques, I think the concept of a music hall of fame is counterproductive.

Music is not a sport. No winners, no losers. Obviously, there are hierarchies in regards to success — who sold more records, who is deemed more "influential." Is that the Rock Hall's justification for its existence? To be a metric of musical importance?When the Beatles formed in the early 1960s, their ultimate goal wasn't to be inducted into a hall of fame chosen by so-called "rock experts"— mainly industry executives and music journalists who wrote for Rolling Stone Magazine — or have their memorabilia on display in a museum in Cleveland.

But what do musicians or bands gain from being inducted into the Rock Hall? Quite a bit, as sales and streams for artists increase after being inducted. Some bands extend their tours following the bump in media attention. In a 2011 piece about the Rock Hall for the New York Times, Janet Morrissey writes, "While winning a Grammy often helps one album, a nod from Cleveland can lift an entire back catalog."

So, if there is a monetary incentive for getting in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, why won't the Hall induct musicians who didn't see commercial success in their heyday?

Dissenters often point out the lack of women in the Hall. Of the over 400 musical artists inducted, only 76 are women. Only one all-female rock group — the Go-Go's — has been inducted. Why aren't all-female groups who came before them getting their flowers?

The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame has a physical location: a museum in Cleveland, Ohio. If the museum intends to educate visitors about the history of an entire genre of music, it must recognize the many groundbreaking women who often go overlooked in the history books. Additionally, any telling of the history of rock music without mentioning its black musical tradition is not only incorrect, but inherently racist. The Rock Hall must take a stand against those who think the genre is a white, heterosexual boys' club.

On the question of genre, some criticize that the Rock Hall has included one or two hip-hop acts every year for the last decade. Many of these hip-hop artists, including Jay-Z and Missy Elliott, point to rock and roll as being more about the attitude than it is musical conventions. Elvis Presley has little in common sonically with acts like the White Stripes, but no one would deny that these acts both fit the definition of "rock and roll."

In a shock to no one, the Rock Hall's co-founder Jann Wenner was let go from the board in 2023 after calling female and black musicians not "articulate" enough to be interviewed for his book about the so-called all time greats in rock. Is this who we're letting dictate importance and "the greats"? Who is to say who is more worthy of praise than others? No two people's music tastes are exactly the same.

We as a society need to stop making music a contest over who outsells whom, or who has more Instagram followers than whom. Let musicians be musicians.

Tell the whole story of rock and roll, not a watered down version pleasing the lowest-common-denominator boomers. Rock and roll is alive and kicking. And maybe it doesn't belong in a museum.

Contact **CIELO GAZARD** *at cielo.gazard@yale.edu.*

PERSONAL ESSAY

Time travel on shuffle

// BY STEPHANIE ALTSCHUL



ILLUSTRATION BY SEBASTIAN WOODS

I am utterly incapable of associating songs with their names. At a Playboi Carti concert last Saturday, I was unsurprisingly unable to produce titles for the songs I'd recited from start to finish in the Uber en route.

It's not that the connection between song and title doesn't exist, it's that it only goes one way. Give me a title and I'll reproduce my favorite songs word-for-word, but give me a song and all I get is a memory.

Halfway through Carti's set, I heard no more than the first three synth notes of "Like Weezy" before I was transported back to the first time I listened to the track. Instead of the skull-crushing chords pounding from the gargantuan concert speaker system, I remembered hearing tinny, muddied bass from a borrowed airpod as I walked through a statue garden with a friend.

On a run later that weekend, a playlist gem set my pace: Quevedo's and Bizarrap's "Music Session." I felt the Minnesota sun — from three summers prior — on my back for a total of 3 minutes and 19 seconds.

Time travel, it seems, is possible — not through some quantum-tech that exists only in Science Hill dreams, but through meticulously-curated playlists and platinum albums by favorite artists.

For many, this time travel is a subconscious act: My mom tunes the car's radio to the "70's on 7" station for an early-childhood throwback. Music-by-the-era tells outsiders, like my Gen-Z self, about the zeitgeist way-back-when. For my parents, Simon & Garfunkel and The Velvet Underground transport them to their childhood homes, their elementary school best friends and the very first album they purchased with saved-up bus money.

Emotionally, too, we're transported. Speaking personally, and perhaps embarrassingly, I've shed more tears to Ken Carson than I have to Jeff Buckley — mixed in with a very reasonable amount of Lana Del Rey and Joni Mitchell. Guilty pleasure songs, as well as those that might not fit in a perfectly curated Late-Night Blues playlist, are not foreign to any music lover.

As a society, this knack of ours is applied in a few ways. More than associating our own music with past experiences, we ascribe meaning to the taste of others. "Performative males" listen to Clairo and Beabadoobee, while a taste aligned with Playboi Carti's Opium label may be associated with traits such as evilness or manipulation. These are entirely common, unbiased views and in no way reflect my own opinions of Carti-listeners. Surely.

This time last year, I spent a monstrous amount of time pondering the "soundtrack to my life" for college applications. I looked through my current aural fixation playlist and landed on Lauryn Hill's "Everything is Everything."

Admittedly, I've moved on to a different soundtrack. I listen to different songs daily and am, also daily, associating these with new memories, new people and new feelings. "Everything is Everything" might not be the soundtrack for my entire life, but I know that twenty years from now, I'll listen on a whim and be transported to the fall of my senior year in high school, sleeping in and collecting songs for a, now stagnant, high school throwback playlist.

Contact **STEPHANIE ALTSCHUL** *at stephanie.altschul@yale.edu.*

WEEKEND RECOMMENDS:

BUYING A CHEAP RECORD PLAYER