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"We are the Champions": **Masculinities, Sports and Popular Music**

Ken McLeod

This paper explores the increasing confluence between music and sport, two previously largely distinct realms of cultural production. Focusing on the popularity and marketing of sports rock and hypermasculinized sports anthems by gay icons Queen, the Village People and Pet Shop Boys, this article theorizes the often paradoxical social and sexual codes engendered by the relationship of sports and popular music.

The relationship between sports and popular music forms an important, although little understood nexus of cultural production. The popular reception of British invasion bands and their effeminized hair styles and attention to fashion challenged notions of physical integrity on the basis on gender that had previously underpinned both sports and music. The intersection of these two cultural spheres has often been regarded as dichotomous and tense. The liberal hedonism associated with 1960s and early 1970s Anglo-American youth culture, as manifest in rock music, was typically contradicted by athletics, which stressed conservative values of practice, work, and effort over pleasure. During the late '60s, when the Vietnam War was at its height, the dialectic opposition of sports and rock represented an ideological battleground for the hearts and minds of youth. The 1970s, '80s, and '90s brought about an increasing alliance as both forms of entertainment expanded in economical and industrial scope and the commercial benefits of interaction were more readily exploited. From the heightened profile of music in motivating people to exercise to the rise of sports rock genres there has been an escalating confluence of popular music and sports during the past three decades. Crowd chants and club songs permeate European and South American football (soccer) matches, and rock, hip hop, and pop tunes are broadcast to delineate every stoppage of play during NHL, NBA, and Major League Baseball games. Record and video-game companies regularly cross-market artists with various sporting events. The Baha Men's song "Who Let the Dogs Out?", for example, achieved mass popularity primarily through being broadcast at baseball games before

its popularity justified its addition to radio station playlists. In a similar fashion, professional sports leagues, such as the NBA, NFL, and NASCAR, are increasingly defining themselves through musical identities (much as the “extreme” sports of skate- and snowboarding are closely identified with punk or alternative rock).

This essay examines manifestations of sport-rock crossover particularly, though not exclusively, as they exist in North America—home to the largest professional music and sporting market. Of particular consideration are the historical connections between sports and music and the increasing use of popular music as an aid in marketing and reinforcing the image, often a heterosexual masculine image, of many professional sporting leagues. Focusing on hypermasculinized sports rock anthems by gay icons Queen, the Village People and the Pet Shop Boys, this essay also draws on concepts of “spectacle” to theorize the paradoxical social codes and cultural resonance often engendered by the affiliation of sports and popular music.

Sports and Music History

While the focused marketing and popularity of sports music is a more recent social phenomenon, the relationship between sports and music has significant precedents. In the 1930s and '40s a considerable rapport developed between the aesthetics of African American music and sports, such as baseball and basketball. Historians Montye Fuse and Keith Miller, for example, claim: “informed by jazz [and] blues...African American baseball reached its improvisational apotheosis in the careers of Satchel Paige, Cool Papa Bell, and [Jackie] Robinson himself” (120). In similar fashion, jump bands often toured on the same bus as basketball teams, with players and musicians regularly fraternizing and attending each other's events. Quoting Lewis Erenberg's work on Count Basie, sports historian Gena Caponi-Tabery states that “Jumping swing tunes... and high-jumping basketball games were festive events of black cultural unity” (43). More recently, crossover between music and basketball has been most pronounced in the realm of hip hop, two entertainment genres that are allied by everything from shared fashions, attitudes, to urban roots. Several NBA stars have attempted to cross over into the music business, as Shaquille O'Neal, Kobe Bryant, and Alan Iverson have all recorded rap albums. Though not commercially successful, such efforts cemented the relationship between hip hop and basketball. As such, both basketball and African American musical forms such as jazz or, more recently, hip hop and rap represent social rituals whose participants employ similar strategies of competition, improvisation, affirmation, and communal celebration. Built into the structure of African American musical practices and sports such as basketball were complex rhythms, improvisation and stylization, call and response patterns (analogous to the “give and go” pass in basketball), and competitive interaction that required individuals to synchronize and co-ordinate their efforts. Music and sport allowed individuals to assert their excellence as soloists while remaining part of a cohesive group. Basketball coaches who encouraged an African American style of play were like band-leaders in that they also required their

players to both improvise as soloists and simultaneously collaborate as part of a collective ensemble. As such, both jazz and basketball built the sense of a cohesive African American community without sacrificing or diluting individual expression. In a similar fashion many of the tactics of early “Negro League” baseball players were influenced by African American cultural aesthetics, primarily as embodied in jazz and blues.

Notwithstanding these practical instances of music influencing sports and though there are several prominent instances of the confluence of sports *themes* in music, most notably in baseball as outlined above, sport is rarely the subject of pop and rock tunes. Queen’s “Bicycle Race”, Kraftwerk’s “Tour de France,” and the cult Canadian country singer Stompin’ Tom Connor’s rendition of the “The Good Old Hockey Game” (a staple feature of Canadian hockey games) are important examples of this type of less usual intersection between sports and music.

Even classical music has incorporated sports themes. Among the more famous works used in relationship to sporting events is Orff’s *Carmina Burana*, commonly used to rile up basketball crowds during pre-game festivities. Several art music works are also based on, or include references to, sports and athletics, such as Eric Satie’s “Sports et Divertissements” (20 piano cameos of various sports including hunting, golf, and tennis), Georges Bizet’s *Carmen*, and Mike Reid’s contemporary opera “Different Fields.” Other classical associations include the “Three Tenors” concerts that were first held in conjunction with the World Cup soccer tournaments of 1994 and 1998 and Freddie Mercury and Montserrat Caballé’s memorable operatic duet “Barcelona,” a theme song of the 1992 Barcelona Olympics. Notably, one of the earliest English football chants was set by the composer Edward Elgar. An avid fan of Wolverhampton Wanderers, Elgar set the lyrics “He banged the leather for goal!” the tune of which he later reused in his oratorio *Caractacus*.

Underscoring the more rare instances of the use of sports as thematic fodder for popular music is the fact that the relationship between sports and popular music has often been unstable and antagonistic. The rise of rock and roll paralleled the advent of a glamorous career that, particularly in the case of young men, promised a life of pleasure, adulation, and power previously rivaled only by star professional athletes. The popular reception of British invasion bands and their traditionally feminine hair length and fetishization of fashion challenged notions of physical integrity that had previously underpinned the masculine-dominated spheres of both sports and music. Such physical integrity, however, had different meanings in the ideologies of rock and roll and of sport. Sports, along with the military, were visibly male-dominated, patriarchal spaces. To a large degree the militarism of American society reflected itself in its sports culture, which reinforced the pressure on American men to live up to a masculine heroic ideal of fighting. Indeed, athletes and coaches often drew positive parallels between sports and war. The rhetoric of sports such as football is rife with terms such as going on “the attack,” “blitzing” and “the long bomb”—not to mention the significant tradition of college “fight” songs and militaristic marching bands associated with many American university sporting events. Sue Curry Jansen,

among others, has observed the striking similarities of military and sport (particularly American football) terminologies, which serve to reinforce the masculine goals of “old men seeking to enlist young men (and sometimes women) to fight their wars for them” (Jansen 186). Conflations of war, sports, and music were particularly evident following the Gulf War, 9/11, and the war in Iraq. Many sporting events in the US staged musical tributes to the armed forces. Whitney Houston’s rendition of “The Star Spangled Banner” at Super Bowl XXV, punctuated by a fly-over of F-14s, was a direct response to the beginning of the bombing campaign of the 1991 Gulf War only days earlier. The rendition was also the first to hit the pop charts since Jose Feliciano’s controversial rendition in 1968.¹ The 2004 Super Bowl will also perhaps be best remembered for its infamous halftime show that had controversial “patriotic” performances by Janet Jackson and Kid Rock and numerous tributes to the troops involved in the US-Iraq war.

The militaristic confluence of music and sports is often rooted in the idea of the spectacle. The Olympic Games, World Cups, Super Bowls and numerous other high-profile sporting events, including American high school football halftimes, exhibit extravagant musical shows ostensibly in order to hold the attention of their audience. Public spectacles, whether sporting, musical, artistic, or other, have been used throughout history to affirm power and prestige. The gladiatorial spectacles of ancient Rome, for example, are analogous to the musico-theatrical spectacles of the court of Louis XIV at Versailles. Both represented a literal spending of wealth that served to underscore the power of the dominant order by intimidating any would-be threat and that provided a communal diversion from potential social concerns. As such, spectacles were, and remain, instrumental in providing legitimizing symbols that contribute to the construction and stability of the “modern” state. More recently the employment of musical spectacles has often transcended the need for any other dramatic or sporting connection. Large-scale productions, such as Live Aid, the “Three Tenors” stadium shows (originally held concurrently with the World Cup tournaments), have garnered huge international audiences while drawing only on the world of sport for their venues. Indeed, many rock shows actively employ sporting venues, stadiums, and arenas, and thus function on a symbolic level as forms of sporting spectacular, substituting larger-than-life theatrical stage shows for the gladiators or combatants on the field. Such large-scale spectacles, whether sporting, musical, or a combination, typically reflect the sound of wealth—a manifestation of an economic capacity for leisure activities on a grand scale.

The most influential theorizing on the subject of spectacle has occurred in Guy Debord’s *The Society of Spectacle* (1967) and his later *Comments on the Society of Spectacle* (1990). In examining the spectacle of international football on television Debord sums up his view of spectacle as:

The construction and presentation of the wholly commodified game in a colorful, ritzy yet standardized society of the mediated spectacle: The SPECTACLE is capital accumulated to point where it becomes image....It is not just that the relationship

of commodities is now plain to see—commodities are now all that there is to see, the world we see is the world of the commodity (*Society* 25, 29)

Drawing on Debord's definitions, concepts of the 'spectacle' in contemporary theory typically evoke a postmodern notion of the constructedness of an event and how it is framed for a mass audience. The spectacularization of sports and music functions as an outgrowth of increasingly media-driven societies and thus it has become a type of symbol of the globalized commodity. Debord's theories have recently been criticized for trivializing human agency, failing to account for the changing historical terms of spectacle, eliding spectacle with a central dynamic of capitalist social relations, and for a pessimistic failure to account for the affirming social and pleasurable aspects of spectacle (Tomlinson 55–57). The conflation of music and sports during halftime spectacles would particularly seem to reinforce this latter critique of Debord. The self-affirming, communal aspect of many half-time shows, of unison chanting or clapping, directly reinforces a collective and affirmative sociability that underscores human agency and participation in the spectacle. Indeed, it would seem it is the memory of this communal, human, aspect of the spectacle that the marketers of sports music seek to capture. The communal audience barking and fist rolling to "Who Let the Dogs Out," for example, physically enacts the sense of both a sporting moment and the social atmosphere of a party. In their confluence these experiences thus serve to reinforce one another.

Such a warrior ethos and commingling of popular music and sports, seemingly more acceptable today, was nonetheless substantially questioned in the 1960s with the onset of the Vietnam War. Most rock musicians opposed war of any kind, a fact manifest in songs such as Marvin Gaye's "What's Going On," John Lennon's "Give Peace a Chance," and Edwin Starr's 1970 hit "War." Sports, however, doggedly clung to the pristine notion of military heroism, as color guards typically presented flags and war planes flew overhead at many sporting events. The late '60s also saw a shift to a more cerebral, psychedelic experience of music. Previous to the release of the Beach Boys' *Pet Sounds* in 1966 and the Beatles' *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* in 1967, the energy and rhythm of rock music primarily demanded a physical response in the form of dance. Attention increasingly became focused on the lyrics and on the creation of music which promoted more passive intellectual contemplation, often enhanced by the kinesthetic experience of psychedelic drugs. In something of a dichotomy, rock music and its associated drug imagery fulfilled a need for physical expression and sensation, manifesting a desire for a more enhanced and connected experience of the world, while simultaneously promoting physical passivity and an escape from perceived oppressive realities.

Sports, likewise, entered an era of increasing experimentation with performance-enhancing drugs. Though few athletes were concerned with passivity or escape, it is arguably the very experience of sports, with its suspension of real time and space, that offers the transgressive release from oppressive reality sought in counterculture drug use and psychedelic music. Nonetheless, the hedonism associated with late '60s and early '70s youth culture and rock music was often contradicted by athletics,

which fundamentally stressed practice, work, and effort over leisure and pleasure (Zang 25).

Following the more confrontational relationship between rock and sports from the late 1960s into the 1980s was a period of increasing alliance as both industries recognized that they could benefit each other commercially. By 1990 the sports-music nexus was so ingrained that even independent artists such as New Order were composing sports songs, such as “World in Motion,” the official theme for the English World Cup finals that year, a song that also became their first number-one hit. As described earlier, the increasing convergence and cross marketing of these two forms of mass entertainment and leisure culture continues unabated today.² This phenomenon could be expected given the numerous similarities between rock and sports. Sport and rock music, for example, encourage the pleasures of physical bodily experience through both participation and passive audience consumption. Both are preoccupied with disciplined performativity and physical display. Also noteworthy in this regard is Pierre Bourdieu’s contention that:

the near miraculous orchestration of a team strategy [results in] a pleasure no less intense and learned than the pleasure a music-lover derives from a particularly successful rendering of a favorite work....In other words, everything seems to suggest that, in sport as in music, extension of the public beyond the circle of amateurs helps to reinforce the reign of the pure professionals. (Bourdieu 347)

The similarities do not stop there, however, as sports and music have largely been driven by and appealed to the energy of youth and promoting the notion of celebrity cult, specifically through similar fanzine culture and fan websites devoted to favorite players and artists. Both have also been active vehicles in the promotion of national identity (and associated notions of cultural colonization) and both were, and arguably remain, bastions of masculine power and control. Late 20th- and early 21st-century corporate strategists have successfully exploited these similarities in order to gain increased market share. Indeed, one of the most overt similarities of sports and music is the increasing proclivity for hyper-commodification.

Marketing Masculinity

Among the most culturally significant examples of the cross-pollination of sports and music is their increasing alignment for the purposes of marketing. Typically, the music associated with most sports is sonically, rhythmically, and vocally aggressive—music that projects a stereotypically masculine image through tone, lyrical content, and performance. One of the clearest examples of this is found in alternative and “extreme sports,” such as skateboarding and snowboarding that have been firmly aligned with punk and alternative hip hop.

In addition to the alignment of punk music with “extreme sports,” more “mainstream” sports are also overtly attempting to align themselves, and thus be identified with various music genres. Stock car racing, the fastest growing professional sport, is famous for its blue-collar southern country music connections. The creation of a

musical identity for NASCAR (National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing) has been secured through recent deals with Cherry Lane Music Publishing. Cherry Lane President Aida Gurwicz has stated that the company's mission, under the name "Motor Music," is to "brand NASCAR with a library of music that creates another layer of enjoyment for fans and brings in new fans" (Bessman 42). Indeed, in an effort to broaden its fan base and reflect something of the diversity of its current base of supporters, NASCAR has already begun integrating popular (mostly hard rock, alternative and heavy metal) music into its TV broadcasts and plans to create "original" musical themes for various drivers, teams, and tracks. NASCAR Vice President of Broadcasting Paul Brooks has noted that NASCAR is already the second most popular televised sport: "We're creating a [musical] NASCAR logo ID and a large library of music with a stronger connection to the sport that all our partners can pull from and that we can integrate into our T.V. broadcasts" (Bessman 42). While this is likely true, it appears that this more inclusive musical image is still largely rooted in overtly aggressive, stereotypically masculine-oriented styles of music.

Not to be outdone, the National Basketball Association has rapidly increased its ties with numerous record labels and artists. During all stoppages of play in current NBA games the arenas pulsate with Top 40 singles. Since 2001, half-time shows at play-off games have included concerts from such acts as U2, Destiny's Child, and Sugar Ray. Frequent videos on music networks MTV and BET promote hip-hop artists sporting jerseys and headbands of their favorite teams, and often include shots of their favorite players. In 2002 a number of promotional videos for the NBA were launched, featuring performers such as Lenny Kravitz, Pink, and No Doubt. Senior Vice President of Marketing for Jive Records, Randy Miller, claims that "[f]or us it's a great opportunity to put new artists and established talent in front of an NBA audience" (Bachelor 50).

While the NBA currently appears to be trying to reach new audiences by associating itself with a variety of musical styles, the crossover between the music industry and professional basketball, as mentioned, has traditionally been most pronounced in the use of hip hop. According to Millar, with "[h]ip-hop music and basketball there is a natural alliance....Hip-hop is a music that comes from urban America, and basketball is a sport that comes from urban America" (Bachelor 50). Indeed basketball and hip hop share a very similar visual image: headbands, baggy clothing, and competitive attitude. As such they often share a heavily aggressive heterosexual masculine image. Something of this convergence is seen in the slam dunk move, which has been described by cultural critic Nelson George as "[i]ntimidation through improvisation" (George xv). Nonetheless, the NBA has by no means limited its musical focus to hip hop. Just as NASCAR is attempting to expand its fan base by expanding their country and western image, NBA league executives have recently emphasized a diversity of musical genres. While much of the musical image of the NBA still draws on hypermasculine hip-hop imagery, unlike NASCAR, the league has at times even associated itself with artists with significant female and gay appeal. Disco diva Gloria Gaynor, Justin Timberlake, Nelly, and

Christina Aguilera, for example, were part of the 2003 all-star events, and acts such as Elton John, Michelle Branch, and the Dave Mathews Band have also performed in conjunction with other NBA events. NBA executives have recognized the marketing potential of associating their league with a wider variety of music personalities, seeking to exploit their personas to expand the potential cultural and gender appeal of their product.

However unlikely it may seem, the sports music phenomenon has even occurred in the traditionally staid white-collar world of golf. In recent years a number of songwriters and at least two record companies have involved themselves in the genre of golf music. This genre, notably, typically relies more on the lyrical *theme* of golf, rather than a particular sound or musical style, though most examples tend towards middle-of-the-road white blues. One company, Private Music, believes in the concept enough to have launched a golf label called “Teed Off Records,” that released the compilation album “Golf’s Greatest Hits” in 1996. The compilation featured songs such as Loudon Wainwright III’s “Golfin’ Blues,” although it not the first or only instance of so-called “golf music.” The soundtrack for Kevin Costner’s film *Tin Cup*, for example, made it as high as No. 85 on the *Billboard* 200 and featured songs like Bruce Hornsby’s “Big Stick” and Mickey Jones’ “Double Bogey Blues.” Indeed, the existence of a musical golf repertoire has a long history and there are sheet-music songs taking golf as a subject dating to as early as 1896 (Rosen 1, 26). Possibly the first golf album was *Songs Fore Golfers*, recorded by Oscar Brand and his Sandtrappers and released by Elektra in 1956. Huey Lewis and the News later used the title *Fore!* for their 1986 album. Another album, released by Four Leaf Clover in 2001, *Jazz at the 19th Hole*, represented yet another attempt to broaden the marketing net, this time by linking the specific genre of easy-listening jazz to golf.

Baseball also has a particularly rich musical history. Like golf, and unlike NASCAR’s and the NBA’s targeted use of music that typically evokes a bodily response to market themselves, music associated with baseball uses the sport itself as thematic lyrical material and, like the jazz and blues repertoire of golf, thus tends to have an intellectual, often nostalgic, appeal.³ In addition to numerous club theme songs, the classic “Take Me Out to the Ball Game” (1908) is a ubiquitous feature of the seventh inning stretches in baseball games at all locations and levels ranging from amateur to professional. A number of other baseball tunes have reached iconic status among fans, including Terry Cashman’s hit “Talkin’ Baseball—Willie, Mickey & ‘The Duke’” from 1981 and John Fogerty’s “Centerfield” from 1985. Like their basketball brethren, in the past baseball stars, such as Mickey Mantle and Les Brown (“Joltin’ Joe Di Maggio”), have enhanced their public profile by recording songs. This phenomenon has even crossed language and cultural divides, as witnessed by the recent release of *Roberto Clemente: Un Tributo Musical*, an album which features a variety of salsa performances in honor of the late superstar Roberto Clemente by Latin players including Dennis Martinez, Jose Mesa, Javy Lopez, Tony Perez, and Sandy Alomar Jr. among others. The reverse situation has also occasionally occurred, most notably perhaps in the case of country music star Charlie Pride who, after a

successful “Negro League” career, turned to country music only after failing in try-outs with the California Angels and New York Mets.

Although it is not a song that uses baseball as a specific theme, the Baha Men’s hit single “Who Let the Dogs Out” is the most conspicuous example of the confluence of sports and music marketing to date. Music distributor Pro Sports Marketing was primarily responsible for the group’s break-out hit when they distributed the single to minor league baseball stadiums and other sporting arenas in 1999. The song achieved widespread popularity, particularly at baseball games, and was subsequently added to radio station playlists. In this instance it was only the song’s initial popularity at sporting venues which impacted its subsequent success on the musical charts and playlists.⁴

“Who Let the Dogs Out” may be the first of many hits to find its first audience at sporting events.⁵ Joe DiMuro, Vice President of BMG Music’s Strategic Marketing, foresees ever-increasing integrations between music and sports, stating: “Let’s face it: The music industry is in a declining state. We are acutely aware of that. We need to find new ways of promoting our artists as a way of generating revenues” (Bachelor 50). Though this explanation for the phenomenon is almost entirely rooted in the logic of economics and market expansion, it nonetheless also touches on an aspect of postmodern capitalism via globalization that, given the rate of corporate media mergers, is resulting in ever-increasing integrations and cross-pollinations of media and content to appeal to the largest and most diverse audiences possible. The drive for corporate globalization has created new media pastiches and marketing opportunities such as sports music and film music.

A related trend is the increasing presence of major label musical artists in sports-related video games. Groups such as Aerosmith (three songs on Tecmo’s *Dead or Alive 3* for Xbox), Metallica (featured in Infogame’s *Test Drive Off-Road: Wide Open*), and Blink 182 (one of 12 acts contributing songs to Infogame’s *Splashdown*, a jet-ski action game) have all created music for sports-related video games. Moreover, some acts have even taken roles in the games themselves. Bare Naked Ladies have not only lent their song “It’s Only Me (The Wizard of Magic Land)” to the Electronic Arts Sports hockey game, *NHL 2002*, but the band even appears in the game via a create-a-player mode. The *NHL 2002* game was released for PC and PS2 two months before the release of the band’s *All Their Greatest Hits* album.

This rationale is not new and is rooted in hybrid marketing strategies the benefits of which are common to both band and label. Echoing the justification by Joe DiMuro cited above, Don Terbush, senior director of Film and New Media Advertising for Universal Music Enterprises, states that, “[v]ideo games such as *Splashdown*, have provided labels with a great alternative means of gaining exposure for new music and even music by more established acts” (Traiman 75). However, Dave Warfield, producer of NHL franchise games for EA Sports, has noted that the general idea of music in video games is what he calls “emotion and recognition” (Traiman 75). While such a description can be variously interpreted, the music in video games ideally evokes an emotion that would be remembered and associated

with a specific game and a particular brand. Activision brand manager David Pokress observes: "It's not just about extreme action sports, but it's also about the lifestyle of our games, which are targeted at teens and young adult males who are into music" (Traiman 75). It is no surprise that video sports games are aimed primarily at young heterosexual males. There are few sports video games aimed at young female consumers, notably excepting "Mia Hamm's Soccer 64" and "Mia Hamm's Shootout." Perhaps notwithstanding the character of "Sporty Spice" from the now defunct Spice Girls, or the general athleticism exhibited by artists such as Gwen Steffani or Pink, there have been few consistently definable instances of sports-music confluences aimed at young women (Groppe 2001). As such, music and video game companies have accepted the gender specificity assumed in the sports market and have, generally, not sought to diversify in this way.

While issues of gender and sexual identity have not been a significant consideration, sports organizations such as NASCAR and the NBA have associated themselves with various types and styles of music in order to forge a wider fan base, to establish a recognizable sonic identity, or merely in order to cash in on lucrative cross-marketing potential. The sports music phenomenon has, at times, impacted public taste such that some companies have begun to focus specifically on packaging and distributing the music played at sporting events. The company Tommy Boy, for example, introduced its first "Jock Rock" album in 1994 and has since released a number of dance-oriented "Jock Jams" albums and a "Slam Jams" album of punk and new wave. Tommy Boy president Monica Lynch says she came up with the idea for "Jock" compilations when she realized that a lot of the same music (such as Gary Glitter's "Rock and Roll Part 2" and Queen's "We Will Rock You") was being played at different venues for different sports. The label teamed with ESPN shortly after this realization to create compilations of music. According to Lynch the albums attracted a much larger audience than anticipated:

We found that they are attractive not only to people who would go to major league sports, but we also developed a base in colleges and universities that have big athletic programs and in high school and grade schools. These albums basically became the ultimate soundtracks to any sport. Any songs we put on these compilations has to pass the lampshade test. Which means if someone got drunk enough, would they put a lampshade on their head and dance around to it? (Olson "Labels" 77-78)

This latter admission raises a troubling social issue given that, in the same breath, Lynch notes the desire to develop a fan base within high schools and even grade schools. Despite this questionable marketing strategy linked to alcohol consumption (admittedly another common link to both music and sports cultures), the Tommy Boy series has resulted in significant sales. According to Soundscan, the top sellers are "Jock Jams Vol. 1" at 2.3 million units and "Jock Jams Vol. 2" at 1.9 million. Success breeds imitation and in 1997 K-Tel began a sports music series which they labeled "The Greatest Sports Rock & Jams" and has subsequently released albums inspired by, and catering to fans of, baseball, football, basketball, and professional wrestling.⁶

Sports Rock Anthems

The significant convergence of music and sports has had perhaps its most prominent manifestation in the form of several rock tunes that have acquired anthem status through repeated play at sporting events. Indeed, the singing of national anthems is the traditional starting point for most sporting events, whether amateur or professional. The focused subject of this article does not permit a detailed investigation of the phenomenon but certainly the tradition serves to reinforce the nationalistic character of most sports—and analogous nationalistic musico-cultural inferences. More pertinent to this current investigation are songs such as Gary Glitter's "Rock and Roll Part 2," Steam's "Na Na Hey Hey Kiss Him Goodbye," The Village People's "YMCA," and "Go West" and Queen's "We are the Champions."⁷ As such, these are all works that, while neither originally popularized through sporting events nor overtly thematically concerned with sports, have subsequently risen to iconic anthem status due largely to their significant exposure at sporting events and their perceived associations with sports culture. Significantly, these anthems are the often the products of gay icons and contain overt lyrical celebrations of homosexuality. As such, they problematize the typical heterosexual masculine associations of music and sport discussed thus far.

A strong element of the appeal common to all of these sports anthems is that they feature memorable and easily sung choruses in which fans can readily participate. These chanted choruses, which were a particularly marked feature of 1970s' glam rockers such as Gary Glitter, Slade, the Sweet, and Queen, are a direct extension and emulation of the actual sounds of soccer supporters. During the 1970s soccer also influenced rock fashion and behavior as the fad for tartan scarf waving, associated with acts like the Bay City Rollers and Rod Stewart and the Faces, was directly modeled on the soccer 'terrace' culture from the same period (Rowe 166).

Perhaps the most widely recognizable of these tunes are Queen's "We Will Rock You" and "We are the Champions" that first appeared on the album *News of the World* in 1977. Released as a double A-side single they were a Top 10 hit in both North America and Britain when they premiered. These two tunes have achieved lasting significance, however, through their subsequent ubiquitous exposure at major sporting events throughout North America and Europe. Riding the phenomenal sports arena successes of "We are the Champions" and "We Will Rock You," former Queen guitarist Brian May has even written a piece called "Stadium Rock" (1996) specifically for use by marching bands. This light rock composition was intended for high school-level bands and includes three short pieces incorporating various sports chants, tunes, and (à la "We Will Rock You") rhythmic hand claps.

One of the more recent and interesting instances of the emergence of a sports anthem is the song "Go West," originally a 1979 disco classic by the Village People but made even more famous when it was covered by the Pet Shop Boys in 1993. In the wake of the Pet Shop Boys' version, the melody has become a staple underpinning for many English soccer chants, including "One Nil, to the Arsenal," and "Go West

Bromwich Albion,” as well as many more vulgar variations. The chant, in its original lyrical form, received significant international exposure during the 2002 World Cup, co-hosted by Korea and Japan, where it was heard at almost every match regardless of whether or not England was playing.

Often playing with notions of sexual ambiguity, the Pet Shop Boys (Neil Tennant and Chris Lowe) are well known for consciously cultivating superficiality in opposition to their perception of the pomposity of much rock music. They take a liminal aesthetic stance that constantly shifts between stereotypes of high and low art, juxtaposing, for example, classic disco hits with allusions to Shostakovich and scenes from Harold Pinter (Balfour 365). The Pet Shop Boys remade “Go West,” originally a Village People classic from 1979, for their album *Very* in 1993 complete with the help of an all-male chorus. The reference to the gay men’s chorus here postdates the Village People’s version and transforms the song from its original celebration of a gay American dream epitomized by the desire to go west to a Californian, San Francisco, lifestyle of sunshine, sand, and sex into a haunting but uplifting disco dream framed by the specter of AIDS. The video took an altogether different approach, using the lyrics to portray an ironic comment on the defeat of Soviet communism and the increasing ‘westernization’ of Russia. Sport plays a prominent role in the video which features the buff, athletic bodies of young men, resembling Soviet-era gymnasts, set against the odd spectacle of the Pet Shop Boys in futuristic suits on flying surfboards (symbolic of the California lifestyle of the original tune but also resembling cold war-era inter-continental ballistic missiles). The athletic male chorus butchly intoning “Go West” is contrasted by Neil Tennant’s effete lead vocal and both are supplemented by the presence of the Statue of Liberty come to life in the form of a black R&B diva. The thematic inversions at play here are numerous. The presence of a black female liberty, representing the West, contrasts the white male bodies of the East while the Pet Shop Boys’ futuristic outfits enigmatically resist location. Notably, the song ends openly on a dominant seventh chord, rather than a traditionally normative tonic close, reinforcing the liminal and open-ended message of the work. Further, the chord progression of the song references Johann Pachelbel’s *Canon*, as emphasized in the opening phrases. Thus the song in the Pet Shop Boys’ version takes on several layers of meaning: gay anthem and AIDS lament, western social critique, and a postmodern musical pastiche that transfers meaning from Pachelbel through the Village People to the Pet Shop Boys. Though dealing with a serious subject matter, the song playfully resists a singular interpretation—associated with the rigidity of a heterosexual world view—in favor of diversity and a multiplicity of interpretations. This layering of meaning was compounded when the song was adopted as a communal football anthem during the World Cup. Sung in English by tens of thousands of Korean and Japanese fans, the song became an overtly ironic statement on the “far eastern” setting of the tournament as well as on the general globalization and commoditization of the game of football itself, as it truly is a “world” cup.⁸

What is undeniable in many of the instances of the sports anthem phenomenon is their open association with homosexual artists and themes. Precisely why gay

anthems by Queen, the Village People, Pet Shop Boys, and Gary Glitter became popular at sporting events, events that typically overtly affirm a heterosexual masculine world view, is not immediately obvious. The University of Virginia's football fight song, for example, is regularly altered by fans to reflect anti-gay sentiments. To the lyrics "We come from Old Virginia where all is bright and gay" the student body ad lib a response of "no way!" Nonetheless, in an apparent paradox, songs like "YMCA," "Go West," or "We Are the Champions" that overtly espouse the virtues and pleasures of gay sex are openly celebrated, indeed often physically enacted in the case of "YMCA", by middle-class heterosexual America at sporting events.

Despite the gradually increasing visibility of gay and lesbian athletes, as sports historian Brian Pronger has recently stated, "I am aware of no scholarly research that shows mainstream sport to be a significantly welcome environment for sexual minorities" (Pronger 224). If sport is a forum where homosexuality has been traditionally discouraged, then popular music is a forum where it has, at least by comparison, been relatively tolerated and at times even celebrated. The popularity of the hypermasculinized sports anthems described above—gay anthems that use aggressive unison rhythms, muscular bass lines, and male choruses singing in relatively low registers emulating sports chants—simultaneously celebrate masculine power and physical performance while also permitting an open, communal expression of bodily participation that transcends sexual orientation and gender preferences. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's theory of the body suggests that the body's power to move and connect with other bodies is socially organized and that desire is the very essence of being. In this manner the bodily connections possible through sports can be linked to the bodily connections of music, particularly in the desire to participate in communal physical movements, including dancing, the wave, cheering, and chanting. Thus the desire exhibited by, principally, heterosexual sport fans to enact the letters of YMCA with outstretched arms, overrides any consideration or awareness of the homosexual connotation of the song's lyrics. Homosexual anthems of liberation have thus been successfully co-opted to serve traditional heterosexual masculine leisure.

One concept that helps throw light on the penchant for gay sports anthems is the idea of the carnivalesque, famously described by Mikhail Bakhtin as:

something that is created when the themes of carnival twist, mutate and invert standard themes of societal make-up...the extravagant juxtaposition of the grotesque mixing and confrontations of high and low, upper-class and lower-class, spiritual and material, young and old, male and female, daily identity and festive mask, serious conventions and their parodies, gloomy medieval times and joyous utopian visions. The key to carnival culture involves the temporary suspension of all hierarchical distinctions and barriers among men...and prohibitions of usual life. (Bakhtin 15)

Bakhtin's concept of hierarchical inversion aligns well with the simultaneous juxtaposition of gay and masculine sports anthems.⁹ Originally extravagant visions of homosexual utopias (such as "YMCA" or "We Are the Champions"), these songs

began as inversions of “normative” heterosexual identity, but have been re-inverted and juxtaposed against the very ideal of the heterosexual life that these songs originally critiqued. One might point to the seeming dichotomy, as often happens at sporting events, of the juxtaposition of overtly heterosexual anthems, such as “Who Let the Dogs Out?” with gay pride anthems. The carnivalesque spectacle of a large-scale sporting event, however, allows for and encourages such polarities. Furthermore, in the communal celebration of the spectacle such songs allow for a collective audience identification with the abilities and perceived power of the athletes, a carnivalesque masking of their true identities, in which all identities, including social prohibitions regarding sexual preference, appear to be momentarily suspended. Such carnivalesque moments are also manifest by athletes on the field as, particularly during moments of triumph, normative heterosexual behavior is suspended while athletes celebrate through communal same-sex dances, hugging, and kissing. Thus the “gay” sports anthem reinforces and parallels the transgressive suspension of time and space that sport itself often engenders.

Though they are outside the immediate focus of this study there are numerous other important manifestations of the cross-pollination of music and sports that are worthy of detailed study—exercise music, acrobatics, sports videos, movies, and dance, to name but a few.¹⁰ As has been discussed, however, the confluence of sport and popular music, whether in the guise of sports rock anthems or various cross-marketing initiatives, forms an increasingly prevalent feature of contemporary cultural production. In part a function of cultural hyper-commodification that produces increasingly homogeneous and commercial entertainment hybrids, rock and sport cultures mutually “play” off each other in an isomorphic exchange of style, ideologies, and forms. Posing unique challenges to notions of mind–body dualities, gender codes, and sexual orientation, the paradoxical and often conflicting relationships associated with these modes of leisure and entertainment are not culturally or ideologically distinct but, rather, are increasingly parallel modes of contemporary social practice.

Notes

- [1] Feliciano’s hauntingly original blues-inspired version of the “Star Spangled Banner” underlines the discordant relationship of sport and music. Recorded during game five of the 1968 World Series between Detroit and St. Louis, it was widely panned by both fans and critics (Tiger stadium reportedly received over 2000 complaints in the first hour). Despite this fact RCA decided to release the stadium recording as a single.
- [2] At the time of writing this article, *Unity*, the official album of the 2004 Athens Olympics is climbing the pop charts. The work features an eclectic mix of pop-rock and world music artists such as Sting, Moby, and Alice Cooper.
- [3] One should not, however, overlook songs which, though not about baseball *per se*, nonetheless have substantial baseball association. Sister Sledge’s “We are Family,” for example, was integrally linked to and hence, for many, evocative of the 1980 Pittsburgh Pirate’s World Series campaign. Similarly, thanks to the movie *Major League*, the Troggs’ “Wild Thing” has become almost universally associated with the entrance of the closer or a new pitcher. The relationship between baseball and country music also has strong roots as

genres saw parallel developments throughout the 20th century—the growth of radio and television, for example, ensured both entertainment forms received national exposure as the century unfolded. For more on the confluence of baseball and country music see Cusic.

- [4] Notably, Pro Sports' other activities include arranging pre-game concerts, disc and concert ticket giveaways at sporting events, and supplying music clips for syndicated radio shows. While the primary repertoire of stadium sports music is rock and R&B with a party vibe, the company recently arranged for the cross-genre act Three Mo' Tenors to perform "The Star Spangled Banner" and "America the Beautiful" at Cal Ripkin's final game in Baltimore (Olsen, "Pro Sports" 59).
- [5] Another instance of sports creating a "hit" tune is provided by Eric Idle's song "Always Look on the Bright side of Life," which was originally released as part of the soundtrack for Monty Python's film, *Life of Brian*, in the early 1980s. In the 1990–91 season it became a popular anthem among football supporters, especially those of Manchester United, and as a result the re-released single achieved considerable success on the pop charts in Britain. A different and perhaps even more unusual case of sports influencing the charts is provided by "Nadia's Theme (The Young and The Restless)," which, though written by Barry de Vorzon and Perry Botkin Jr. in 1971 for the movie *Bless the Beasts and the Children* and subsequently adopted as the theme of the TV soap opera *The Young and the Restless* in 1973, achieved Top 10 pop status in 1976 after Nadia Comaneche used the tune in one of her floor-exercise routines at the Montreal Olympics. The incorporation of music into sports as diverse as gymnastic floor exercises, free-style skiing, BMX biking (background music), ice skating, and synchronized swimming is another often neglected aspect of the relationship between sports and music.
- [6] Unlike many labels such as Tommy Boy that merely dabble in the sports marketplace Alphabet City's entire business is made up of sports compilations. The New York-based company has created 20 albums that are primarily team specific for a variety of NFL, NBA, NHL, and NCAA franchises. The company's top sellers are the Chicago Bulls albums, one of which has sold over 500,000 units (Olsen, "Labels" 77–78).
- [7] Gary Glitter's hit "Rock and Roll Part 2" was one of the biggest hits of 1972, reaching number two in the UK and the Top 10 in America. Glitter was well known for his outrageous wardrobe which included over 30 glitter suits and 50 pairs of platform boots. Sadly in the late 1990s Glitter was convicted of child pornography and his career fell apart. Though Glitter himself was not gay his flamboyant stage persona, which could be fairly labeled as camp, and lifestyle made him an icon of the gay community.

Steam's "Na Na Hey Hey Kiss Him Goodbye" is another popular rock anthem commonly heard at sporting events. Released in 1969, the song rose to number one in the UK and sold over a million copies in the US alone. The song became a hit all over again when it was covered by the British girl group Bananarama. Notably, however, the song is also the (unofficial) anthem of the Chicago White Sox and also appeared on *The Dallas Cowboys: The Ultimate Team*. The irony here is that the song celebrates the break up of a woman from a man; indeed, the work was also featured on a 1993 album entitled *There was Love (The Divorce Songs)*.
- [8] The irony of the song being sung at a sporting event in the "Far East" should not be overlooked and indeed the English comedy duo Ant and Dec released a parody version of the song called "Go East" as part of a World Cup compilation. Also included on this album was a remake of the Village People's "Macho Man" in a parody called "Sumo Man."
- [9] Bakhtin's concept of carnivalesque has notably also been invoked in relation to the musical component of beach volley ball (see Klink).
- [10] The increasing encroachment of various forms of faceless technology and neo- puritanical privileging of the intellect has led several scholars to decry the gradual marginalization and exscription of the body from the discourse and production of contemporary popular music. Notwithstanding the merits of many such arguments, a significant repertoire that resists this categorization is music used to accompany exercise (step aerobics, kick boxing, circuit training, yoga, Pilates, etc.) and various forms of dance. The explosion of health consciousness of the past 20 years, what Pierre Bordieu has termed the "cult of health," has been paralleled by an unrecognized yet concomitant expansion in the creation and marketing of music to accompany exercise of mind and body. Rather than marginalizing the

body, exercise and dance music directly invokes bodily participation—indeed it is valued precisely because it stimulates and encourages bodily response.

Despite the huge popularity of dance and exercise music, such genres are often neglected by social commentators or devalued due to their tendency for seemingly simplistic repetitive beats. Like muzak and other forms of ambient music, “exercise” and dance music has been marginalized due to its *functional* use. It is not produced purely for *aesthetic* contemplation. Thus dance and exercise music is often viewed as less consequential than the supposedly more cerebrally oriented genres of jazz and classical music.

It is important to recognize, however, that all dance music can be closely linked to sports in its embodiment of physicality and competition evident in genres such as acrobatics, swing, square dancing, and break dancing. Even disco, as manifest in the dance competition central to *Saturday Night Fever*, often had a competitive physical component. Indeed, as early as the Renaissance, court dances often provided the aristocracy with one of their only forms of exercise. As with exercise music, however, the overt association with the body and physical activity has resulted in dance music typically being devalued and often overlooked in modern scholarship.

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