

ARTS & BOOKS

Lucy in the charts with diamonds

By Antoine PIETRI

Forty years after they plugged in their first electric guitar, 1960's rock stars are amazingly popular among today's teenagers.

"Eighteen till I die"

In the last few months the covers of most music magazines –if not all– have been monopolized, by the recent releases of "Chaos and Creation in the Backyard" and "A Bigger Bang", the newest albums by Paul McCartney (former bass player of the Beatles) and the Rolling Stones. As one could expect, the two CDs are already becoming best-sellers. How can the everlasting success of these artists be explained, almost half a century after they came up with the tunes that made them famous? As *The Economist* points out, one of the main reasons is the size of the baby-boom generation. They grew up listening to these revolutionary tunes, and they have no trouble affording the tickets to their stadium concerts today. Mid-life crisis might be a little easier to handle if the music you enjoyed as a teenager is still up and alive. A surprising fact is that alongside these 50 year old fans, new ones keep coming. The number of youngsters enjoying oldies is on the increase: 75% of attendees in Beatle-fans conventions are under 30, as the Beatles historian Martin Lewis points out.¹

"I believe in yesterday"

Jenny, 18 years old, remembers how excited she was when she went to her first Rolling Stones concert at the Sydney Superdome back in 2003. "Nothing else I had ever seen before has come close to this experience", says the young student. This new generation doesn't seem to mind listening to the same music as their parents, or even grand parents. Many of them actually discovered this music by going through their parents' vinyl records, or attended their idols' concerts with them.

So, where does that leave today's music?

"If you ask me, music died in the 70s", Thomas, a New York ninth-grader, asserts. "Anything that came out after that just sounds the same, it just doesn't interest me", states this 14 year old Hendrix fan. The only new bands that matter to him and his peers are the ones that sound more or less like the old rock standards – which explains the success of cover bands, or even remixes like Elvis' "A little less conversation" in 2002, which topped the charts for a while, 25 years after the King's death.²

"Money for nothing"

Not surprisingly, this seemingly inexhaustible source of income is exploited mercilessly by producers and assignees alike. And there are plenty cash cows to milk : old artists creating new albums are one species, but old songs in new packaging are even more lucrative. As long as there will oldies' fans, new exclusive Bob Marley and the Wailers best-of CDs wrapped up so as to look like brand new material will flourish. Neil Young was probably right when he sang, in one of his most famous songs, "Hey, hey, my my, rock and roll will never die".

¹ "The Times They Are A'changin'. Really." *The Economist* 29 September 2005.

"Kids Listen to Their Parent's... Music." *USA Today* 30 March 2004.

² All the interviews with young sixties fans were made by A. Pietri in October 2005.