

Like a Rolling Stone: Notions of Youth Travel and Tourism in Pop Music of the Sixties, Seventies, and Eighties

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Introduction

“Get me a ticket for an airplane,
Ain’t got time to take a fast train . . .”
—The Box Tops (“The Letter”)

In *The Tourist*, MacCannell (1976) suggests that popular culture is central to the “organized meaning” that motivates travel and underlines all desire. Popular music can be seen as an indicator of youth ideas about tourism, travel, and “getting away.” Thus, it can be added to MacCannell’s roster of the commodities that have become an integral part of American culture.

In fact, popular music can be seen as an alternate influence when more conventional forms of travel advertising do not work. The glossy magazines that swayed middle-class parents to travel to the Caribbean are no longer useful in motivating a generation that often seems determined to reject its parents’ values. Moreover, high-status advertising is not pointed at youthful travelers, who do not have the money the tourist boards are interested in. In addition, youthful travelers may have vastly different notions of status, involving a brand of adventure that cannot be advertised conventionally.

As will be argued in this paper, the values promoted by popular music form an intricate and complex system that, in some cases, can be seen to supersede the archetypal adult values of middle-class suburban America. In the world of rock and roll, speed and spontaneity, as well as an inner knowledge about the “in” and “hip,” are necessary for individual success and fulfillment. Travel-related pop songs reflect a mixture of societal, personal, and sometimes archaic perceptions of tourism. The themes and isolated lyrics of these songs are a valid and pragmatic indicator of youth trends regarding travel and the influence that popular music continues to have on these trends. (See “Appendix I” for a chronological listing of selected pop travel songs of the 1960s to 1980s. See “Appendix II” for the travel-related lyrics of some of these songs.)

The Beach Boys and the Pre-Jet Set

The Sixties saw the beginning of a youth rebellion, as well as the introduction of jet travel on a widespread level. Although the youth rebellion began in the 1950s with James Dean and Marlon Brando, the Beach Boys set the stage in the 1960s for a type of youth counterculture involving sun and surf. The music of the Beach Boys promised the joyful colors and energetic euphoria of beach life in California and Hawaii. While their parents went to the Caribbean to sip fruity drinks, teens headed for Malibu and Santa Monica to meet each other and to frolic to such songs as “Two Girls For Every Boy” and “Catch A Wave You’ll Be Sittin’ On Top Of The World.”

These titles and their lyrics promised a certain kind of abandoned experience, while, at the same time, they sounded strangely similar to the promotional praises of conventional tourist advertising. The Beach Boys’ song, “(Let’s Go To) Hawaii,” bellowed a tourist board’s message and invited listeners to “. . . come on and come along with me.”

Was this musical spirit of communalism different than commercialism? Were travel songs being written in

the Sixties because people were going somewhere, or were people going somewhere because of the lure of travel songs?

Certainly, direct advertising was not the intent of the Beach Boys, who actually lived the life they promoted. Yet, their songs had the friendly warmth of advertisements, beckoning tourists to "come do this with us." Following MacCannell's argument (1976), the appearance of spontaneity in the Beach Boys' music was the formula for success. However, contrary to MacCannell's contention, the success of this music was not due to its signaling of adulthood, but rather because it fostered a brand of youthful irresponsibility, accommodating the person living "just for kicks."

In the Beach Boys' world, however, the kicks were available only to a local elite, and the rest had to travel to get there. In fact, this was an inversion of the standard that the farther one goes, the more status one receives. The assumption in the Beach Boys' music was that everyone was within driving distance of the West Coast hot-spots. Furthermore, the Beach Boys provided a clear model to follow with regard to life-style: bikinis, tans, big American cars, and surfboards.

In keeping with MacCannell's hypothesis, we can see how the Beach Boys' music, with its prescriptive suggestions for a youthful life-style and its highly organized system of meanings, spurred youthful travel desires in the 1960s. "Surfin' USA," a song that invites the listener to come and be part of the "in" crowd, reads like a roll call of California's most scenic beaches: Doheny, Del Mar, Malibu, Redondo, Pacific Palisades, Santa Cruz, and so on. This song, and other Beach Boys' songs like it, belies the notion that youths are looking for individualism when they strike out to travel, because, in pure pop, overindividuality quickly leads to alienation unless it is a precursor to a fad.

The Beatles and the Jet Era

As MacCannell states, ". . . refinement of a lifestyle occurs through a process of emulating elites . . . this requires designated leaders . . ." (1976:31). If radio and popular music are seen as cultural productions, then pop stars are the leaders. And, in the 1960s and 1970s, the Beatles were the most elite of the governing council.

In direct mockery of the Beach Boys' song, "California Girls," the Beatles penned the song, "Back in the USSR." This jet-age song propels the pop star from Miami Beach to Moscow, perhaps in ridicule of domestic travel markers. The song takes its narrator to the Ukraine, where the girls really "knock him out," and to Moscow, where they make him "sing and shout." It provides a model of a life-style for light-hearted jet-setters, who skim across oceans and continents for hedonistic pleasure. Although the purported model is purposely false, it does not seem to matter. The song takes the listener to an exotic sight, and, in so doing, treats foreign place markers in a joyous and positive fashion:

"Show me round your snow-peaked mountains way down south
Take me to your daddy's farm
Let me hear your balalaikas ringing out
Come and keep your comrade warm . . ."

Another Beatles' creation involving a pop travel tradition is the 1967 album *Magical Mystery Tour*. This tour into fantasy threatens to kidnap the listener and take him or her to a place far away: "The Magical Mystery tour is coming to take you away . . . take you away, take you today." As with the Beach Boys' songs, the lyrics of the *Magical Mystery Tour* are, in some cases, strangely reminiscent of conventional tourist-board or corporate travel slogans, only they are directed toward a youthful audience. Many critics and analysts of the Beatles' lyrics have suggested that the "Magical Mystery Tour" is a drug-induced one, which, in the youth scheme, is still recognized as a valid form of travel. Whatever the Beatles' intent, the messages in their music appealed to a hyperactive pop youth culture striving for speed in the jet age.

The Genuine Pop Star: Trading in Beatles Boots for Desert Boots

In a way, pop stars' lives are, themselves, cultural productions, in that they involve exposure to public scrutiny. Pop stars are known to travel in private jets and frequent luxury hotel suites—a style of travel that is anathema to the travelers described by Teas (1988; this issue) in her discussion of youthful travel styles. Indeed, in the Beatles' and Beach Boys' music, cost is disregarded in an attempt to focus on the fun and meaning of a place.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, however, there also emerged a class of pop stars who provided a more rugged, perhaps lower-class model of youthful travel. Pop artists such as Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young and Simon and Garfunkel sang anthems for those who trekked across America with their thumbs out or who traveled by train through such exotic sites as North Africa.

The popular Crosby, Stills, and Nash song of the late 1960s, "Marrakech Express," paints a vivid scene of traveling for those who are willing to "hop aboard the train . . ." and to buy "striped djellebas we can wear

home.” (See Teas’ article in this issue for a discussion of the strong desire among youthful travelers in foreign countries to adopt native dress.) As a song, “Marrakech Express” promotes little glamour but more adventure than many other pop songs, and it is indicative of a trend that began in the 1960s of wandering cheaply and unrestrained. This trend is also apparent in Bob Dylan’s 1975 song, “Mozambique,” which deals with exotica, beauty, and freedom. Simon and Garfunkel also wrote songs about the “drifter-traveler,” as defined by Cohen (1973). The Simon and Garfunkel song, “America,” describes a couple who, with only some cigarettes and fruit pies as “real estate,” “walk off to look for America.” Although these American nomads are not headed for the exotic or spiritual, their journey has the aura of a pilgrimage:

“Kathy, I said as we boarded the Greyhound in Pittsburgh,
Michigan seems like a dream to me now.
It took me four days to hitchhike to Saginaw,
I’ve come to look for America . . .”

There is also a sense of hardship—shared hardship—in the course of the journey, which serves to bind the two together, despite their lack of money or status in conventional terms. Songs such as “Homeward Bound” and “Why Don’t You Write Me?” also reflect this hardship and lack of concern with material interests. In these songs, youthful needs go beyond that which can be bought.

This view, as presented by Simon and Garfunkel and Crosby, Stills, and Nash (and sometimes Young), is one of “genuine structure,” as defined by MacCannell (1976). The images in these songs are of a reality that cannot be sold or traded. The ride on a train through Marrakech or the young American couple’s journey through open fields are so realistic as to be almost real. On the “Marrakech Express”:

“Looking at the world through the sunset in your eyes.
Traveling the train through clear Moroccan skies —
Ducks, and pigs, and chickens call,
Animal carpet wall to wall
American ladies five foot tall, in blue...
Colored cottons hang in the air, charming cobras
In the square, striped djellebas we can wear at home”

As image-setters, Crosby, Stills, and Nash also appeared to live the life they were promoting in their lyrics. Although still a cultural “production” by virtue of their records and public performances, Crosby, Stills, and Nash, with their long hair and beards, jeans, and ethnic-looking ponchos, somehow appeared less “produced” and more “genuine” than many of their fellow pop stars. Thus, unlike the Beach Boys and Beatles, who sold fantasies that they ultimately could not deliver, the “genuine” pop stars promoted a highly romantic and realizable style of travel for the youth of the Sixties and Seventies, who, through this and other forms of popular culture (e.g., Kerouac’s works), were well versed in this type of living.

In addition, it is interesting to note that the urgency for love, a genuine phenomenon, played a major role in much of this work. Many of the songs of this era were about men returning to women who they left behind on their journeys. In “Marrakech Express,” the speaker pines, “Hope the days that lie ahead bring us back to where they’ve led.” In “The Letter” by the Box Tops, the narrator feverishly attempts to return to his “girl”:

“Give me a ticket for an airplane,
Ain’t got time to take a fast train.
Lonely days are gone I’m going home
My baby wrote me a letter.
“I don’t care how much money I got to spend,
Got to get back to my baby again . . .”

On the flip side is the Looking Glass’ 1972 hit, “Brandy,” which laments the plight of the archetypal woman who patiently waits for her man to return home from sea:

“Brandy wears a braided chain
Made of finest silver from the north of Spain.
A locket that bears the name of the
Man that Brandy loves . . .
“Brandy, what a fine girl
What a good wife you would be
But my life, my love, and my lady is the sea . . .”

Women, Pilgrimage, and a Mythical Center

Although “Brandy,” the song about the martyrdom of a woman who waits for her traveling man to return

home, was one of the biggest hits of the early 1970s, songs about traveling women also made their way onto the pop charts during the Sixties, Seventies, and Eighties. "Next Plane to London" by The Rose Garden and "Leavin' on a Jet Plane" by Peter, Paul, and Mary were both written in the mid-Sixties and dealt with the needs of women to "get away" and "make it" on their own. Despite the "safe" locations that were the destinations in most of these songs, these songs nevertheless spoke of self-fulfillment that could be achieved *without* men. For example, the speaker in "Next Plane to London" explains:

"Told him I was gonna be a star
But to do it I would have to go far away
But I'd come back some day
And take him away . . .
"I'm on the next plane to London
Leavin' on runway number five . . ."

The Beatles, too, sang of a woman fleeing from her man in "Ticket to Ride." The song is not only about a woman's leaving a man, but about a journey of independence for her: "She said that livin' with me was drivin' her mad . . . She's got a ticket to ride and she don't care."

The destination in many of these songs about women travelers was London, the spiritual home of pop in the Sixties (Melly 1971). Even today, the pop "center," Carnaby Street, and the clubs that showcased the pop bands of the Sixties and Seventies have a religious aura for youthful travelers, who go there to see "where it all happened."

Pilgrimage centers of this sort also occurred in America and were reflected in pop music. Scott McKenzie's hit, "San Francisco (Be Sure to Wear Flowers in Your Hair)," is one of a number of songs that glorified San Francisco's Haight Ashbury district during "The Summer of Love." Similarly, Crosby, Stills, and Nash's "Woodstock" (written by Joni Mitchell), tells the story of the festival as a mythic tale:

"Well then can I walk beside you
I have come to lose the smog
And I feel as if a cog in something turning . . .
"By the time we got to Woodstock we were
Half a million strong
And everywhere was a song and a celebration . . ."

The significance of these places has been lost among the current generation of youth, who are experiencing a "different moment." Although the influences occurring in the Sixties, Seventies, and Eighties have not changed dramatically, the manifestations and symbols of these influences have. Now, instead of focusing on "in" spots, pop music about travel expresses the need to "get away to a better place." The city is no longer a pivotal destination point; rather, it serves to trap and depress youth, who "stare out the window and think about their holidays" ("That's Entertainment" by The Jam). The city so enjoyed on those hot summer nights by John Sebastian in the 1966 hit tune "Summer in the City" (The Lovin' Spoonful) has become Paul Weller's "Wasteland" (The Jam). Coming from modern Britain these days are songs about a despair so great that it is only lightened by forays into the sublime in foreign settings (e.g., Madness' "Night Boat to Cairo" and The Style Council's album "A Paris"). The Marine Girls, a British group, sing about "A Place in the Sun":

"Imagine a sunny holiday,
parasol cafe,
corner table for two
and that is me and you . . ."

This theme can also be found in American popular music—for example, the 1982 Go Gos' hit "Vacation," in which the singer laments "Vacation all I ever wanted, Vacation *had* to get away . . ."

Conclusion

In *The Tourist* (1976), MacCannell describes the paradox of the bumper-sticker: Corporations pay people to carry a message by attaching a meaning to a slogan and, eventually, people pay to carry one. As with bumper-stickers, individuals who hear a song on the radio (the format with greatest influence) will eventually pay for albums and tapes with popular songs on them, because the subliminal message of these songs has appealed to them. However, unlike bumper-stickers, which tend to have a limited lifespan as the owner's thrill of having gone somewhere wears off, popular songs tend to have a lasting ability to influence. This influence is, in part, insured by the popular music industry, which continues to promote singles and albums through a detailed format of play-lists and charts.

Although numerous travel songs have been written over the past three decades, many of them remain obscure, because the popular music industry dictates, in large part, which songs become "hits." It is thus apparent

that the travel songs that have swayed the youth of the Sixties, Seventies, and Eighties were the ones that “made it” onto the charts or were sung by groups so popular (e.g., the Beatles) that automatic hit status was assured.

Given, then, the rather sizable number of popular travel songs of the past three decades, it is apparent that travel, and the importance of travel, has remained a constant element in the lives of the young, despite the proliferation of changing symbols.

Appendix I. Chronological Listing of Selected Popular Travel Songs

The Sixties

1. “Travellin’ Man” (Ricky Nelson) 2. “Hawaii” (The Beach Boys) 3. “Surfin’ USA” (The Beach Boys) 4. “Memphis” (Johnny Rivers) 5. “Ticket to Ride” (The Beatles) 6. “California Girls” (The Beach Boys) 7. “Last Train to Clarksville” (The Monkees) 8. “Eight Miles High” (The Byrds) 9. “John Riley” (The Byrds) 10. “Next Plane to London” (The Rose Garden) 11. “California Dreamin’” (The Mamas and the Papas) 12. “Marrakech Express” (Crosby, Stills, and Nash) 13. “Summer in the City” (The Lovin’ Spoonful) 14. “Homeward Bound” (Simon and Garfunkel) 15. “America” (Simon and Garfunkel) 16. “San Francisco” (Scott McKenzie) 17. “Leavin’ on a Jet Plane” (Peter, Paul, and Mary) 18. “Trains and Boats and Planes” (Dionne Warwick) 19. “Magical Mystery Tour” (The Beatles) 20. “Back in the USSR” (The Beatles)

The Seventies

21. “Only Living Boy in New York” (Simon and Garfunkel) 22. “Why Don’t You Write Me?” (Simon and Garfunkel) 23. “Hitchin’ a Ride” (Vanity Fair) 24. “It Never Rains in California” (Albert Hammond) 25. “Brandy” (The Looking Glass) 26. “Mozambique” (Bob Dylan) 27. “English Rose” (The Jam) 28. “Strange Town” (The Jam) 29. “Wasteland” (The Jam)

The Eighties

30. “That’s Entertainment” (The Jam) 31. “Kilimanjaro” (The Teardrop Explodes) 32. “Night Boat to Cairo” (Madness) 33. “Vacation” (The Go Gos) 34. “Flying Over Russia” (The Marine Girls) 35. “A Place in the Sun” (The Marine Girls) 36. “Holiday Song” (The Marine Girls) 37. “A Paris” (The Style Council)

Appendix II. Lyrics of Selected Travel Songs

From “California Girls” (The Beach Boys)

Well East Coast girls are hip
I really dig those styles they wear.
And Southern girls with the way they talk
They knock me out when I’m down there.
The Midwest farmer’s daughters
Really make you feel all right.
And the Northern girls
With the way they kiss they keep
Their boyfriends warm at night.
The West Coast has the sunshine and the
Girls all get so tan.
I dig a French bikini on a wild island doll
By a palm tree in the sand.
I been all around this great big world
And I seen all kinds of girls
But I couldn’t wait to get back to
The States back to
The cutest girls in the world.
I wish they all could be California girls . . .

From “Travellin’ Man” (Ricky Nelson)

Pretty Polynesian baby over the sea
I remember the nights
When we walked in the sands of Waikiki
And I held her oh so tight . . .
Oh my sweet Fraulein down in Berlin Town
Makes my heart start to yearn

And my China Doll down in old Hong Kong
Waits for my return . . .

From “Only Living Boy in New York” (Simon and Garfunkel)

Tom, get your plane right on time,
I know your part’ll go fine
Fly down to Mexico . . .
Tom, get your plane right on time
I know you’ve been eager to fly now
Here I am the only living boy in New York . . .

From “Back in the USSR” (The Beatles)

Flew in from Miami Beach BOAC
Didn’t get to bed last night.
On the way the paper bag was on my knee,
Man I had a dreadful flight.
I’m back in the USSR.
You don’t know how lucky you are boy
Back in the USSR.
Been away so long I hardly knew the place,
Gee it’s good to be back home.
Leave it til tomorrow to unpack my case,
Honey disconnect the phone.
I’m back in the USSR.
You don’t know how lucky you are boy
Back in the USSR.
Well the Ukraine girls really knock me out
They leave the west behind
And Moscow girls make me sing and shout
That Georgia’s always on my mind . . .

From “Hitchin’ a Ride” (Vanity Fair)

Thumb goes up, a car goes by
Oh won’t somebody stop and help a guy?
Hitchin’ a ride. Hitchin’ a ride.
Ain’t got no money to board a train
I’m nearly drownin’ in the pourin’ rain.
Hitchin’ a ride. Hitchin’ a ride.

From “Strange Town” (The Jam)

Found myself in a strange town,
Though I’ve only been here for three weeks now,
I’ve got blisters on my feet
Trying to find a friend in Oxford Street.
I bought an A-Z Guide Book
Trying to find the clubs and YMCA
When you ask in a strange town, they say
“Don’t know, don’t care and I gotta go mate . . .”
You’ve got to move in a straight line
You’ve got to walk and talk in 4/4 time.
You can’t be weird in a strange town
You’ll be betrayed by your accent and manners
You’ve got to wear the right clothes
Be careful not to pick or scratch your nose
You can’t be nice in a strange town
“Because we don’t know, don’t care and we gotta go mate...”

From "English Rose" (The Jam)

No matter where I roam I will return to my English Rose . . .
Sailed the seven seas
Flown the whole blue sky
But I return with haste to be at her side
No matter where I roam I will return to my English Rose . . .
Been to ancient worlds
Scoured the whole universe
Caught the first train home
To be at her side . . .

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