All I’ve got to do is Act Naturally”: Issues of Image and Performance in the Beatles’ Films

Submitted by Stephanie Anne Piotrowski, AHEA, to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English (Film Studies), 01 October 2008.

This thesis is available for Library use on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper acknowledgement.

I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.

(signed)…………….Stephanie Piotrowski …………………
Abstract

In this thesis, I examine the Beatles’ five feature films in order to argue how undermining generic convention and manipulating performance codes allowed the band to control their relationship with their audience and to gain autonomy over their output. Drawing from P. David Marshall’s work on defining performance codes from the music, film, and television industries, I examine film form and style to illustrate how the Beatles’ filmmakers used these codes in different combinations from previous pop and classical musicals in order to illicit certain responses from the audience. In doing so, the role of the audience from passive viewer to active participant changed the way musicians used film to communicate with their fans. I also consider how the Beatles’ image changed throughout their career as reflected in their films as a way of charting the band’s journey from pop stars to musicians, while also considering the social and cultural factors represented in the band’s image. Such elements in the Beatles’ carefully constructed image reflected youth culture and countercultural thoughts and beliefs. Finally, through a close analysis of the Beatles’ musical sequences I have shown how experimentation with artistic synergy enabled the band to produce new and innovative films and lyrics while allowing each member to develop as individual musicians. This experimentation and willingness to undermine traditional film and pop music practices helped to change artists’ approaches in the entertainment industries.
Acknowledgements

I know many people have reservations about acknowledgements, especially in a PhD thesis. However, there are a number of people who deserve to have their names be part of this thesis, a piece of work which has been my most challenging to date.

I found that during the writing of this thesis, postgraduate research could be a very defeating and isolating process at various stages. I give my sincerest praises to Jesus Christ whose words and blessings gave me hope and motivation at every achievement and especially at every moment where I desperately needed strength to see this through. I truly felt God was always therewith me, just as He is now.

Great thanks are in order to Dr. James Lyons for going above and beyond the call of his supervisor duties. James worked so hard with me to produce the best piece of work I was capable of. There were many times where this was probably more difficult than what most experience, but he didn’t give up on me. As a result, this is a piece of work I can truly be proud of. Thank you also to Professor Steve Neale (I can’t thank you enough and I feel honored to have been taught by you), Dr. K.J. Donnelly, Dr. Helen Hanson, Dr. Karen Edwards, and Ms. Sue Collman (who sorted through all my financial crises with patience).

This thesis would have never happened without the love and (often financial) support of my wonderful parents, Paul and Mary Piotrowski. My parents always went along with my ambitious dreams and I cannot express in words how great and cool they are and always were. Thank you also to my sister Melodie and brother Ryan Brodin, (yes - you too Shaggie), my grandparents: Alfred and Elois Piotrowski and all my aunts, uncles, and cousins for their letters, Christmas cards, parcels, visits, thoughts and prayers (to name them all would equal another thesis). All of you are very much in this thesis. I want to specifically mention Hdly Vincent (for turning me onto the Beatles with Backbeat at the cinema), Janet Ziesemer (my
Beatle buddy from high school and great friend always) Nick Piotrowski, Grandpa Jill (perhaps the only person who truly understood what England really meant to me), Adam Jill, Jennifer Doan, Uncle Dan Hughes, and Aunt Mary Ann Glowicki.

I want to thank my Central Michigan University posse (Fire up Chips!) – great friends whom I consider to be family: Lisa and Stan Finch, Brenda and Mark McDowell, Janice Nicole and Brett Mayo, Eric Richmond, Nate Bryce, Toby and Carrie McGillis, Robin McGillis, and Doug Binando (RIP). I will never forget your unending love and support. At the University of Exeter: Caroline Green, Dr. Amy McGill, Dr. Gillian Cairns, Dr. Darren Bevin, Lyndsay Cooper, Sophie Nicholson, Dr. Khalid Almezzaini, Baptiste Auguie, Dr. Cathy Monroe-Hotes, and Christine Whitney. Also, thank you to everyone at Sacred Heart Church in Exeter (The Espigs, The Leapers, Val Silmon, Dennis and Molly, Father Michael Wheaton, Deacon Delian Bower, and the great Monsignor Harry Doyle). The people of Sacred Heart were always welcoming to me. It was a great place to really feel spiritually nourished and inspired.

To all of my friends and colleagues at the University of Exeter library, special collections and the Bill Douglas Centre, specifically Lesha Fossey, Martin Myhill, Elizabeth Henderson, Carol Giles, Dr. Jessica Gardner, Dr. Christine Faunch, Charlotte Berry, Michelle Allen, Phil Wickham, Paul Auchtelenie, Sue Browne, Sue Inskip, Caroline Huxtable, Diane Workman, Laetitia Brochon-Harmsworth, Grahame Parry, Sunie Fletcher, Iain Stewart, and all the other evening staff who made those long night shifts fun, and Mike Rickard for his friendship and lovely cups of tea. I loved my time as a librarian. Those many opportunities and responsibilities that I was blessed with meant more to me that I could ever say. Thank you all.

Thank you to all those teachers who inspired me over the years: Mr. Tony Rongo, Mr. Ken Smith (who taught me how to write), Ms. Ruth Bonnell, Mr Michael Wemple, Mrs. Sandy Shafer, Professor Eric Johnson. Without your
influence and enthusiasm, I would have been lost as to which direction I wanted to go in.

Thank you to my colleagues at the University of Teesside who have supported me as I was finishing my corrections. Professor Gerda Roper, Christa van Raalte, Andy Burtenshaw for persevering with the law for me, Mike Kirkup (the greatest mentor ever), Paul Baldwin, Paul Bailey, Bethany Usher, Einar Thorsen, Vin Arthey, Andy Price, Warren Harrison, Dr. Rachel Carroll, and Dr. Fin McMorrnan – the best roomie ever. I really love working at Teesside – thank you for hiring me and for your continuing support.

In tradition with saving the best for last, I want to thank Dr. Mark Fremaux. Mark, you are truly the love of my life and I can’t articulate adequately just how much you mean to me. Because of you, I came back to England, pursued the MA, and the PhD. You always believed in me and you always kept me going. You had put up with all the distressed and blubbering phone calls; you are my rock. Thank you is not enough for all you have done for me. I am a better person because of your support and love. I love you.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements......................................................................................................3