

Long play: adult-oriented popular music and the temporal logics of the post-war sound recording industry in the USA

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[T]he future development of the record business lies not so much with the teenagers and the pop single record buyers as in the search for new channels of exposure which lead directly to the large potential audience beyond . . . another market with completely different tastes – young married and older people, who are important to the selling of albums (Capitol Records Vice-President Alan W. Livingston, 1952: 39)

Two quotes about back catalogues and careers, 18 years apart, tell us something about under-recognized continuities in the popular music business. In 1974, a half-dozen years after rock music had taken over from adult pop as the dominant economic and cultural force in the US record industry, Joe Smith, president of Warner Brothers Records, claimed that ‘today’s best rock artists are as viable for long-term careers as the older generation of Sinatra or Dean Martin’ (quoted in *Billboard*, 1974: 3). Almost two decades later, in the wake of the grunge revolution, Bob Buziak, a former President of RCA Records, suggested that, ‘The artists that will be ongoing and important to this business, that will build the catalogs and long-term careers, are going to come from [alternative] music. Alternative bands will be the next U2 or Pink Floyd’ (quoted in Azerrad, 1992: 64). In each case, an older artist is compared to a newer/younger artist to illustrate that the economic viability of each is fundamentally tied to continuing sales over the longer term. From Frank Sinatra to Pink Floyd to Hole (one of the bands discussed in Azerrad, 1992), success does not simply mean having a blockbuster hit single. Rather, developing a career that extends over the long haul and that leads to a continuously selling back catalogue of long-play albums is seen to represent the key to true

success in the post-war music industry. Azerrad's article, which is about the signing frenzy around alternative rock bands in the wake of Nirvana's breakthrough, is less about a radical shift in musical taste than an ongoing industrial logic. In claiming that 'the major labels have begun to realize that unlike lightweight dance-pop artists, alternative bands have the potential for long-term catalogue sales, the fiscal backbone of any label' (Azerrad, 1992: 64), the *Rolling Stone* writer is laying out what has been a fundamental business strategy of the recording industry for decades, and one that has crossed generational and stylistic divides. This strategy cuts across cultural formations that are usually posed as antithetical and antagonistic, such as adult pop and youth rock. Thus, rather than radically rejecting and rebuilding the musical mainstream, rock actually appropriated a number of the key institutions of the adult pop formation in the process of installing itself as the dominant force in the US recording industry by the 1970s. What I will call the 'long-play' institutions of the LP album and the LP back catalogue were first fully articulated during the 1950s, with the adult-oriented popular music of singers such as Sinatra leading the way.

Yet this most obvious continuity between adult pop and youth rock – their shared, core commodity form, the LP album – is seldom commented upon. Could it be because industrial issues, unless they support a total repudiation of the capitalist music business, are seen as being beneath the lofty concerns of rock culture? What I call 'boomer historiography' is selectively blind to the industrial elements that contributed to the birth of rock music because the ideology of rock itself consistently disavows rock's commercial status. A similar process is discernible in the way rhetorics of rupture and revolution regularly structure rock historiography; momentous 'breaks with the past' (1955, 1964, 1977, 1991) are privileged not because they accurately convey shifts in musical formations, but because valuing rebellion and resistance demands privileging rupture over continuity. Thus rock historiography effectively reproduces the articles of faith of the culture it purports to chronicle in its structural emphasis on breaks with the past. What if, instead of focusing on change, we looked at continuities between pre-rock and rock? What kind of story would we have then? Most obviously, since the industrial continuities seem to far outweigh the changes, rock's status as commercial culture would then, 'unfortunately', be foregrounded. If we produce a history of rock that has less to do with a grand narrative of rebellion and more to do with industrial transformations and institutional continuities, we may find that key transitions involve not heroic ruptures with tradition (1955, 1964, etc.), but, rather, slow, long evolutions in an ongoing industrial model. This model ultimately produces consistent results – elevated cultural capital *and* elevated profits – across different musical formations.

In the rest of this article, I will be interested in what I see as under-analysed but important developments in post-war popular music: the

segmentation of mainstream audience/market formations, the rise of the album as the core commodity of the music industry, the growth of the back catalogue as the economic foundation that stabilizes the unpredictable nature of selling musical popularity, and, to a much lesser extent, the extended performer career as the ultimate goal of both artist and label. These are key innovations that fundamentally transformed the music industry and the status of popular music as culture, and they remain crucial to this day. They initially emerged as part of the adult pop formation, and then became central to the rise, success and dominance of rock music. These 'long-play' institutions simultaneously propelled profitability for the record industry and cultural legitimacy for popular performers and music.

Age-format stratification

Numerous historians of the US sound recording industry have noted that the post-war period saw the rise of what Philip Ennis calls 'a strategy of age stratification' (1992: 267) within the white mainstream. This involved differentiating market segments by age, with teenagers and adults as the basic constituencies (Chapple and Garofalo, 1977: 45; Denisoff and Romanowski, 1991: 3–4; Smith, 1998: 50–51). Ennis argues that, in the early 1950s, the album and singles markets 'diverged' and two different 'exploitation systems' emerged, radio and jukeboxes for teen-oriented singles, and store display and print advertising for adult-oriented albums (1992: 135). Chapple and Garofalo note that during this period, '[t]he majors restructured their pop divisions, separating the production and marketing of singles from that of albums. This made sense because at the time pop singles sold to a younger audience than did albums' (1977: 45). A major factor in this process had been the introduction of two brand-new formats for popular music in 1948–9. While RCA-Victor struggled briefly to establish its invention, the 45 rpm, as a medium for classical music, it instead became identified with teen pop singles. Conversely, the Columbia-invented LP became the medium for albums of music aimed at adult listeners, whether classical, jazz, Broadway musical scores, mood music, or the theme albums of adult pop vocalists like Sinatra. A 1950 *Down Beat* article notes that 'Decca's move into 45 pretty definitely sets the patterns for pop and longhair releases from here on out, with 45 being the pop speed and 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ the longhair' (*Down Beat*, 1950: 1), while *Billboard* pointed out in 1954 that 'The adult market is primarily a package market . . . more adults buy albums and more kids buy singles' (*Billboard*, 1954: 1). Howard P. Chudacoff remarks that '[t]he recording industry, aided by the advent of vinyl plastic phonograph records, which took the form of 45 rpm "singles" and 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ rpm long-playing albums ("LPs"), experienced explosive growth

and reinforced the bifurcation of popular music into life-stage divisions' (1989: 155).

While idealized, this 'bifurcation' of the white mainstream into teen/single and adult/album age-format segments contributed to a more complex kind of stratification, glimpsed in the pop vs. longhair opposition seen above.¹ Because European art music and jazz (increasingly seen in the 1950s as 'America's classical music') were grouped with adult pop via their shared format, the LP, it was increasingly possible to conceive of adult pop as itself a kind of 'classical' or bourgeois high art (see Keightley, 2001 for a discussion of this in the context of the popular 'standard' song and adult audience formations). By the late 1950s, it was clear that classical and adult pop were grouped together via LPs: 'trade observers say it is evident that the LP is the adult disk in either classical or pop' (*Billboard*, 1959: 3). We see the reading of the adult/album vs. teen/single opposition in terms of high/low discourse in the following 1963 *Billboard* editorial, which notes that singles are associated with a teen market:

For more than a decade now, record companies have been making albums in 33 speed and aiming primarily at an adult market. . . . The results of these policies have been that the general public identifies the 33 as 'good' music, while it classifies the 45 with the black leather jacket and motorcycle set. (Cook, 1963: 3)

One format (33 $\frac{1}{3}$ LP) and one audience/market segment thus monopolized 'good' music, with a concomitant denigration of the 'opposite' format and audience formation. But the importance of the adult/album formation lay as well in its economic implications.

The rise of the LP as the core commodity of the US record industry

This section looks at the relative sales importance of phonograph record formats in the 1950s in order to understand the rise to dominance of the LP and the adult pop formation with which it was associated. Around 1932 to 1948, the only viable retail phonograph format was the 78 rpm record, holding one song per side. In 1948, Columbia introduced the 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ LP, and in 1949, RCA-Victor introduced the 45 rpm single. As late as 1953 (although the figures given may actually be for 1952), a *New York Times* article (Parmenter, 1953: 4xx) claimed that 78 sales (\$89.7 million) were still slightly greater, in dollar terms, than LPs and 45s combined (\$83 million). Based on these figures, around 1952–3, LPs represented only 19 percent of the almost \$173 million market for sound recordings (excluding pre-recorded tape). By 1960, LP sales had more than quadrupled, and constituted almost 80 percent of the total expenditure on records; by 1975 singles sales had declined to a mere 8 percent of the market (RIAA figures

cited in Jones and Sorger, 2000: 75). This represents a remarkable change that merits a more detailed charting.

Although the LP had been introduced in 1948, it really came into its own in the early 1950s, particularly around the 'mood music' LP boom of c. 1952. In 1954, *Variety* suggested that the balance of power in the industry was shifting, noting that while 'Up to now, the single sales have been most important, accounting for well over 60% of the total industry sales', albums (known as 'packaged goods')² had made substantial sales inroads and were becoming the 'key factor' in the industry (*Variety*, 1954: 43). By mid-1955, they were claiming that '[i]ncreasingly, package phase of the business is becoming the foundation of the disk industry' (*Variety*, 1955a: 48). Chapple and Garofalo claim that 1955 is the year LP sales break the 50 percent mark for the first time (1977: 44). The *New York Times* pegged 1956 LP sales at almost 60 percent, claiming that 'of every \$100 spent in retail stores, \$58 was spent for 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ r.p.m. 12-inch records and \$36.20 for 45 r.p.m.' (Shelton, 1958: 14xx).³ In 1957, different articles reported differing percentages, but all were in the 65 percent-plus range for LP sales. *Time*: LPs represent 'two-thirds of cash pop sales' (*Time*, 1957: 60). *Business Week*: 'It is estimated that [albums] are taking 65% of sales' (*Business Week*, 1957: 58). *Newsweek* gave the most detailed accounting, which bears reproducing here because it is explicit about age-format segmentation:

Dollar breakdowns of record sales show that only 25 per cent is pop singles, the 89-cent packages that youngsters are likely to buy. Forty-five per cent is popular albums, which because of their \$1.49 to \$4.98 price tags are mostly purchased by adults. . . . Adults, too, buy most of the classical music which accounts for 21 per cent of the record industry's dollar. The remaining 9 per cent is divided among country music, children's records, and such odds and ends as gospel singing . . . [plus sound effects records and poetry readings]. (Chappell, 1957: 82-3)

Similar breakdowns are seen in *Look* (Schickel, 1958) and the *New Yorker* (MacDonald, 1958), which both report singles at under 25 percent. Thus the single has been reduced from approximately 80 percent of all dollars spent (if we include 78s) around 1953, to approximately 25 percent to 35 percent four short years later, while the LP (which didn't exist a decade earlier) has become the foundation of a sound recording industry that had grown exponentially in the interim.

By 1959, *Billboard* was estimating the LP share to be between 66 percent (Chase, 1959: 1) and 70 percent (Ackerman and Rolontz, 1959: 1). In 1961, LPs represented 75 percent of the retail dollar sales of recordings in the US (according to *Billboard's* '1962-63 International Music Industry Buyers Guide and Market Data Report' [1962: 9], which features a chart entitled 'Dollar Sales by Type of Record in 1961'; singles represent 24 percent of the total). This suggests that by the end of the 1950s, the

dominance of the LP was complete. In fact, while the cheaper 45 rpm single had continued to outsell the more expensive LP in terms of *unit* sales until the late 1950s (LPs were priced at approximately four to five times the retail price of 45s), in December 1959 LPs topped 45s in units sold for the first time (based on an unidentified 15 February 1960 article cited in the *Billboard 100th Anniversary Issue*, 1994: 108).⁴

As seen in the repeated references to albums as an 'adult' format that overwhelmingly attracted 'grown-up' consumers, the establishment of the LP as the core commodity of the US record industry also meant that, in economic terms, adults came to be seen as the key consumers of sound recordings. The favoured forms featured on the format (classical and operatic, Broadway musicals, jazz, etc.) contributed to an increased prestige for adult pop albums (and it is in these years that adult pop begins to be referred to by an earlier era's term for classical music, 'good music'). Another aspect of the album's symbolic capital can be glimpsed in the ways in which it was more and more seen to be related to the book, assembled in libraries, and respected as a repository of cultural tradition (see Frith, 1996: 33), in opposition to 'commercial' and 'ephemeral' teen pop. A 1956 *Billboard* piece remarks that 'Some observers have noted that a recording is now marketed in the manner of a book', and identifies 'catalog material' as a key part of this process (Simon, 1956: 1). This suggests that the rising economic centrality of the LP back catalogue was part of a process of cultural sacralization (Levine, 1988).

The stability of the LP

Selling popular music is an unpredictable, and therefore frequently unstable, commercial activity. Profits are dependent on popularity, which is often elusive. In his analysis of what he calls the 'publishing cultural industries', Bernard Miège groups the recording industry with the book publishing industry. He argues that the often erratic sales patterns for cultural commodities such as books or recordings require industrial strategies that seek to stabilize profitability over the long term:

The *uncertainty* (or the instability) of the use values created or taken over by cultural commodities is a specific feature of the cultural industries. . . . A cultural producer, even when using the most refined marketing techniques, always encounters great difficulty in mastering the conditions of valorization for all of his products. This control can only be achieved over a series of products; hence the need to create a catalogue. (Miège, 1989: 43, emphasis in original).

Hence the importance of what Miège (1989) calls the 'dialectic of the hit and the catalogue'; instead of relying entirely on new releases (which may or may not become briefly popular), these industries emphasize the

continuing availability of older, established titles. The back catalogue's slow but steady sales can counterbalance the ups and downs of the uncertain market for new releases, thereby ensuring long-term profitability.

In 1952, a Capitol Records executive laid out the role of the LP and its back catalogue for the post-war music industry in terms very similar to those of Miège. Francis Scott noted that the 'volatile' music business, where no one knows where the next hit is coming from, is 'just like shooting dice' (1952: 36). He argues that the record industry is financially less 'secure' than many other commercial enterprises, largely due to the fact that potential purchasers are able to experience (i.e. hear) the product before paying for it, unlike cinema or books: 'When he pays *his* money, the record buyer takes virtually no chances. The record company takes the chances' (Scott, 1952: 36). Stockholders, however, demand 'stability' as well as high profits; therefore:

It is here that a well-balanced and administered album program performs its most important function. Featuring a wide variety of products and continuing appeal to a broad market, it furnishes both the diversification so highly regarded by investors and a more stable base of operation for the company. (Scott, 1952: 36)

Unlike ephemeral hit singles, albums can have 'continuing appeal', suggesting that long-term sales are becoming a key strategy of the record industry. The title of the piece, 'Album Catalog is Anchor in Stormy Wax Market', graphically renders the importance of album catalogues to the post-war music industry: it is not simply their growing market share, but particularly their stabilizing function, their ability to help weather the storms and droughts of an uncertain marketplace via their ongoing commercial viability, that are increasingly valued by the industry.

One of the central themes of trade press writing about the LP in the 1950s is the contrast between the long-term sales stability of the market for albums versus the turbulent market swings associated with the selling of singles. This is crucially tied to the LP back catalogue, which emerges during this period as the slow-but-steady 'foundation' or 'backbone' of the record industry. The reliable sales and long 'shelf-life' of albums effectively moderate the risks of trying to create ephemeral hit singles, which, in practice, are more often 'misses' (and, which, even when they become 'hits', have a much shorter window of saleability than albums). Numerous trade press articles look at the record industry from this perspective. *Billboard* notes that even though 'Singles Still Vertebra of the Record Market' (as the title of the article puts it [Rolontz, 1954]; recall that dollar sales of LPs don't exceed that of singles until 1955), nonetheless, 'a hit single has an ephemeral nature' (Rolontz, 1954: 15). A year later, *Variety* claims that the 'More erratic state of the pop singles biz is sparking the big swing over to albums' (*Variety*, 1956: 51). What *Variety* describes as the 'long-play security' of LPs relates to the fact that 'the selling pattern is

more orthodox' (1956: 56), reminding us that stability, and therefore long-term profitability, are key industrial goals.

This stability is often seen to result from age differences between the average single purchaser (teens) and the average album purchaser (adults):

Increasingly, package phase of the business is becoming the foundation of the disk industry. . . . One explanation for the steadiness of the package market is that it caters to a more mature audience which knows what it wants and doesn't submit to 'fad' buying as in the pop field. (*Variety*, 1955a: 48)

Here we can see an interaction of high/low discourse with industrial strategies: 'fad' buying by immature teens, rather than being the most sought-after form of consumerist practice, is disparaged by comparison to that of knowledgeable and mature adults with consistent, and therefore predictable, tastes. In the economic long run, adult album purchasers are seen to be more valuable to the industry, ironically because of their refusal to 'submit' to the faddish and erratic activities of the unstable and ephemeral singles market. Thus the album market represented at once an economic foundation for the record industry and a site for the valuing of 'orthodox' traditions that resist novelty and 'mindless' consumption. This intertwining and interdependence of industrial and cultural valorization are key to the ways in which the institution of the album contributed to the legitimization of popular music in the 1950s and beyond.

The temporal logic of the back catalogue

Will Straw (1990: 317ff.) has suggested a useful perspective on the consumption of popular music commodities such as recordings. It involves analysing the ways in which conceptions of cultural value may be mediated by the particular industrial strategies and commercial life-cycles associated with different musical commodities. The implication of institutions like the album or the single in hierarchies of taste has a great deal to do with their differing life-spans as products. Their rates of turnover (faster for singles, slower for albums) are seen by Straw to be deeply implicated in their distinct modes of valorization. The relatively short period of commercial viability for singles and their widespread and intense initial promotion are contrasted by Straw with the longer availability and slower turnover of albums, whose promotion is limited and often involves word of mouth or long-term critical canonization. He sees the differing strategies associated with singles or albums (including album catalogue sales) as involving distinct 'temporal logics' (Straw, 1990: 317), which in turn contribute to the different kinds of 'distinction' (Bourdieu, 1984) potentially associated with each. Comparing the single to the album, Ennis (1992: 138) also notes the album's much 'slower . . . system' of exploitation and promotion in the

1950s, and links this in particular to the ‘long time span’ and older ‘standards’ (Ennis, 1992: 148) of the emerging adult pop formation. As I have already suggested, the LP back catalogue contributes to adult pop’s growing sense of legitimacy and distinctiveness in the 1950s by virtue of a temporal logic of slow velocity sales over an extended period of time.

In the trade press of the period, the steadiness of the adult album market is consistently praised in temporal terms: ‘While the single pop phase is subject to sharp variations, both seasonal and depending on which companies have the hits, the album biz is comparatively steady’ (*Variety*, 1955b: 43; see also *Billboard*, 1956: 21). An advertisement in *Billboard* for Frank Sinatra’s *Look to Your Heart* LP articulates the industry’s strategy of sales across the long term; the tag line of the ad emphasizes that the adult artist’s albums are ‘always good for heavy initial sales and continuing turnover’ (20 April 1959: 5).

When teen album buyers start to be noticed by the industry in the early 1960s, adult albums are still consistently praised for their much longer commercial life-spans. A 1963 *Billboard* article on albums built around a hit single – and therefore presumably aimed at a teen market – notes that adult-oriented albums last ten times as long on the charts:

LP’s rushed out to cash in on single record hit makers have a much shorter tour on the selling end . . . other categories of albums have a far longer life span on the best-selling charts, *Billboard* studies indicate. For example, the original cast albums now on the chart have an average chart tenure of about 69 weeks, as against the average life of 6.7 weeks for albums sired by singles hits. (*Billboard*, 1963: 3).

By the 1960s, adult-oriented LPs derived from Broadway and film musicals had become dominant players not only in terms of initial sales; their reliable ‘continuing turnover’ as back catalogue made them, in essence, the backbone of the backbone of the US record industry. Here, ‘back catalogue’ refers to albums still available for sale after the first six months of release. The rise of the LP as the core commodity of the US record industry in the 1950s was accompanied by the growing economic importance of the album back catalogue. By the 1960s, it was not uncommon to see ‘Original Cast and Soundtrack’ LPs like *Oklahoma!*, *South Pacific*, *The King and I*, *My Fair Lady* or *The Sound of Music* remaining on the bestseller charts for five or more years. With this kind of ‘continuing turnover’, it is easy to see the industrial desirability of adult albums. Unlike ‘ephemeral singles,’ albums such as these kept making money for record labels over a much longer time frame. In 1961, a Columbia executive commented in *Billboard* on the *unephemeral* nature of catalogue albums: ‘It’s amazing how some catalog items just refuse to die’ (quoted in *Billboard Music Week*, 1961: 1). The significance by then of back catalogue is indicated by the suggestion that catalogue sales may represent 50 percent or more of label revenue:

By way of illustrating how important catalog can be when it is properly merchandised, Gallagher estimated that during major restocking programs – as in January – 70 per cent of a company's billing can be derived from catalog. In more normal months, the ratio is likely to be 50–50. (*Billboard Music Week*, 1961: 1; see also *Billboard*, 1958b: 1)

A 1954 *Billboard* article on 'adult disks' suggests that the rise of the LP meant that the relative importance of album catalogue sales had also increased:

Surely, the pre-LP days saw occasional fabulous sales of albums to adults whether it was a Decca original cast etching of a Broadway show or a Toscanini classical set on RCA-Victor. But the bulk of sustained sales over the spread of catalog was nowhere near the present level. (*Billboard*, 1954: 1)

This 'spread' or variety of choice was seen as part of the appeal of the LP catalogue to adult consumers: 'The record companies . . . have done such a handsome job to date in tapping the adult market with widely varied types of LP's . . .' (*Billboard*, 1958a: 6). Russell Sanjek has argued that the rise of the LP also meant an increase in the variety of music that was now continuously available for sale:

The emphasis was no longer on classical music, but on the widest variety of recorded entertainment ever known to the industry, which was often distributed as a 'loss leader' in order to enhance the value of the entire line or its poorest-selling part. (1988: 338–9)

Sanjek states that adults are clearly the market for the catalogue, noting the way the industry's album campaigns were focused 'exclusively on the middle-class white *adult* market' (1988: 338, my emphasis). By 1964, with teen LP sales on the rise, a Warner Brothers executive implies that 'teen albums' and 'catalogue albums' are, like 'teens' and 'adults', mutually exclusive categories: 'the young audience . . . is now represented on the *Billboard* charts in impressive percentages . . . the value of catalog albums has diminished because of the preponderance of teen albums' (*Billboard*, 1964: 8).

This trend continued and, three years later, 'teen' LPs have become 'rock' LPs and outsell adult pop albums for the first time. Ennis (1992: 345) demonstrates that this happens for the first time in 1967.⁵ In 1980, a classic rock LP, Pink Floyd's *Dark Side of the Moon* (1972) becomes the longest-lived and best-selling catalogue album of all time (it is currently *Eagles: Their Greatest Hits*, 1976). By the early 1990s, according to Garofalo (1997: 457), back catalogue sales were estimated to be 'as much as 40% of all album sales', with the vast majority being rock albums. With the introduction of SoundScan sales-information collection technology in 1991, the centrality of catalogue albums to the recording industry became embarrassingly clear, 'because several dozen older albums . . . continued to

sell well many years after their release . . . [and took] up much of the lower half of the chart' (Anand and Peterson 2000: 279–80). As a result, *Billboard* quickly introduced a new 'Top Pop Catalogue Album Chart' that allowed them to remove the catalogue albums from the 'Top Albums' chart. This was done, according to Anand and Peterson, because:

Continual reminders of the fact that some records produced twenty to forty years earlier still outsell most current releases would bring into question the entire strategy of focusing on new products, which is the bedrock assumption on which the entire commercial music industry is constructed. (2000: 280)

Thus, even though the industry itself disavowed it, adult pop's temporal logic had become rock's temporal logic, just as rock had become the dominant force in the industry.⁶

Conclusion: adult pop's 'long-play institutions'

A definitive feature of post-war popular music is the segmentation of certain popular music audiences through the linkage of age and format, resulting in what we might call an 'age-format nexus'. This alignment of teen listeners with the 45 rpm single and adult listeners with the 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ long-play (LP) album in the 1950s also contributed to a stratification of the white mainstream, with the adult pop album moving into a 'high' or legitimized taste position, along with classical music and jazz. This stratification was related to the emergence of the LP as the core commodity of the US record industry around 1955. From 1948 to 1966, the dominant purchasers of that 'core commodity' were adults, making adults the core constituency of the US record business. The sales stability and greater long-term profitability of the LP led the major labels to effectively 'abandon' the singles market to the indies in the mid-1950s, while the majors concentrated their efforts on the adult/LP segment of the market.

It is important here to understand the cultural dimensions and implications of industrial strategies. The institution of the adult album simultaneously minimized risk, maximized profit for record labels *and* contributed to a heightened symbolic capital for LPs (which were more and more perceived to occupy a cultural space similar to that of books). Over time, the LP was positioned as a kind of anti-novelty, even at times anti-modern and anti-mass, commodity. Albums were seen to participate less in the ephemeral fads associated with singles; albums were geared toward long-term sales. This is tied to the slower temporal logic of the LP (compared to that of the single) and its back catalogue, with the latter functioning as an economic 'anchor' or stabilizing 'backbone' for the labels. These factors contributed to a sense of cultural 'heft' associated with LPs, with the gravity of the cultural space occupied by albums deriving in part from their

length of time 'in play', both culturally and industrially.⁷ 'Long-play' here refers at once to the extended duration of musical playback and to the album's ongoing cultural and economic presence, whether in home libraries of LPs or record company back catalogues. All of this meant that albums were taken more seriously than singles, by the industry and by adult consumers. Similarly, adult pop performers were serious about building extended careers and enduring popularity, unlike the one-hit wonders of teen pop's overnight sensations.

These 'long-play institutions' (LPs, back catalogues, extended performer careers) were key to the extraordinary economic growth experienced by the US record industry in the 1950s. But their centrality to the rise of rock culture in the later 1960s, and the even more remarkable growth of the industry into the late 1970s, must also be acknowledged. Rock emerges in the long-term investment – by audiences as well as industry – in performers and albums; thus its cultural legitimacy comes to rest, in part, on its apparent resistance to the evanescent stars and planned obsolescences of pop. Rock becomes the dominant force within the industry, not by rejecting or repudiating the institutions developed by the adult pop formation – quite the contrary. In conjunction with the demographic force of the baby boom, rock's remarkable economic expansion and cultural presence were inextricably tied to its adoption of the key long-play institutions and temporal logic of its apparently unspeakable antecedent, adult pop.

Coda

A half century ago, as the LP was poised to become the core commodity of the US record business, the Vice-President of Capitol Records wrote a remarkably prescient piece for *Variety*, in which he effectively mapped out the development of the industry for the next quarter century. In 'Giant Market of Adults Should be Disk Target', Alan W. Livingston argued that the record business of the early 1950s was overly fixated on the youth market and that the strength of the teen singles business was largely due to the institutionalized link between AM radio disc jockeys and teen listeners. As a result, 'there is no problem in reaching these enthusiastic disk buyers' (Livingston, 1952: 39), whereas the adult LP purchaser was 'harder to reach because the kind of music which most interests [him/her] . . . is not generally played by the disk jockeys, and in fact has little outlet for presentation' (Livingston, 1952: 39). Livingston argued that finding a way to reach adult audiences would be key to the expansion of the US record business:

Whoever first develops a new and ready exposure medium for this sort of musical entertainment will certainly be performing a significant service to the

record industry. He will be responsible for a business growth far greater than anything we have yet experienced . . . the industry will see a giant new market of unimagined proportions opening up . . . (Livingston, 1952: 39)

The precise nature of these ‘new channels of exposure’ would occupy another article entirely. However, the likely candidates include: the massive expansion of US television in the period 1948 to 1955 (musical variety programmes featured a preponderance of adult-oriented ‘standards’); the rise of nationally circulated magazines related to high-fidelity (i.e. LP) music from the late 1940s onward; the new visibility of multi-media, adult-oriented superstars such as Frank Sinatra beginning in 1953; and the later growth of FM radio⁸ and its adult-oriented music formats (the first *Billboard* ‘Easy Listening’ chart begins in 1961). Whatever the causes, as Livingston predicted the US record business exploded to ‘unimagined proportions’ as the LP became its core commodity in the mid-1950s, sold initially to adults, and then, in the late 1960s, to the youth market for rock.

A half century later, the US record industry looked again to the ‘adult’ for economic salvation, and once more the differing logics of the album versus the single were highlighted. The unexpected success of singer-pianist Norah Jones’s 2002 debut album (as of January 2004 it had been on the *Billboard* 200 album chart for a remarkable 97 weeks) led to renewed journalistic interest in marketing music to adults. In a *New York Times* article surveying a wide range of adult-oriented performers, the director of marketing at Jones’s label, Blue Note, suggests that ‘[Norah Jones] speaks to a huge group of people that the music business has forgotten and declared irrelevant’ (Rosen, 2003: 34).⁹ In other words, the youth orientation of the contemporary music industry had led it to overlook a core constituency – a constituency whose music-purchasing habits, perhaps even more than its sheer size, could be crucial for the industry in the long run. According to the RIAA:

. . . consumers 45 years and older now constitute a quarter of the record market and are the fastest-growing group of music buyers. Smarting from the economic downturn and the explosion of Internet file-sharing among teenagers and twenty-somethings, the record industry is increasingly turning its attention to ‘adult music’. (Rosen, 2003: 34)

Thus older consumers appear to be more traditional, not only in their tastes (Rosen, 2003: 34) but also in their allegiance to the established modes of commercial music delivery, particularly in purchasing entire albums of popular music. In contrast, a central justification for ‘ripping’ music from the Internet involves the claim that young people want single *songs*, not entire, expensive albums. This argument rests upon the belief that albums of popular music frequently contain ‘filler’, that is, unwanted tracks that pad out albums containing few really ‘good’ songs.¹⁰ The argument in favour of downloading popular music ‘for free’ is justified according to an

orientation toward individual tracks, whereas adult music buyers seem to accept that individual, well-known songs come 'packaged' together with other music, perhaps as part of a larger musical work.¹¹ Thus the adult music purchaser's apparent allegiance to 'long-play' logics (i.e. approaching albums as complex and coherent works of art whose value is assessed over the long term; appreciating the extended performer career as comprising a kind of multi-faceted totality, in which each album may function as a quasi-autobiographical 'statement' in a longer star narrative) may one day return the 'adult' to its former industrial prominence. Conversely, the development of legal, for-profit music downloading websites (such as Apple's recently launched iTunes) may herald the return of a singles-dominated model of music retailing, one made virtually obsolete with the rise of the CD album as the core commodity of the North American industry in the 1990s.

Notes

I would like to thank Will Straw for his inspiration and commentary.

1. This bifurcation is idealized because it privileges already privileged, white, urban, often middle-class musical consumers, who are taken to constitute the entire field of popular music (which can then be segmented by age alone). Obviously, this necessitated the exclusion of, in particular, adult consumers who happened to be African-American or inhabitants of rural areas (the equally idealized consumers of R&B or Country musics).

2. During the 1950s, in many US states, hard liquor was usually purchased in what were commonly known as 'package stores' or 'packaged goods' stores, which were of course limited to those who were 21 years of age or older. Thus the record industry's internal term for albums, 'packages', might have connoted an additional 'adulthood' alongside the belief that albums were most often purchased by adults.

3. See Jarrett (1998: 56) for a fascinating interview with Columbia LP producer George Avakian, who notes that, in 1957, pop LP sales accounted for an astounding 82 cents out of every dollar spent on Columbia records of *all* genres and formats. This remarkable statistic underlines the utter dominance of the (adult) pop LP at the time.

4. As early as 1956, industry commentators were noting that the numbers of releases of singles and of LPs were converging (Grevatt, 1956). However, unit sales of singles were usually far higher than unit sales of LPs, and it is the conflict between popularity (as measured in units sold) versus profitability (retail dollar sales amounts) as measures of 'success' that informs much rock historiography dealing with the period.

5. See MacDonald (1994: 296) for a discussion of this phenomenon in the UK context around 1966–8.

6. Anand and Peterson (2000) imply that the post-SoundScan 'catalogue' chart was a first for *Billboard*. However, almost 40 years earlier, as the LP was becoming the core commodity of the US record industry, *Billboard* had published its first catalogue album chart, as part of their new 'Packaged Record Buying Guide' (29 August 1953: 56). It was made up of staples of the adult album market,

'Broadway Shows, Movies and TV', 'Symphony' and 'Complete Opera and Oratorio' albums. Among the 'Pop Album Catalog Sellers' were the soundtracks to *Showboat* and *An American in Paris* and the Original Broadway Cast albums of *Guys and Dolls* and *Oklahoma!*

7. See also Straw (1999) regarding what he calls the 'monumentality' of the LP.

8. The FCC's ruling that US station-owners had to differentiate their FM from their AM stations (which, prior to 1967, frequently featured simulcasts of the same programmes) is a later factor in the expansion of the youth rock LP segment of the market (insofar as it is believed to have contributed to the rise of 'underground FM' stations that played albums rather than singles). It is noteworthy that the 'non-duplicating rule' came into effect at the precise moment the rock LP became dominant, 1967; subsequently, 'AOR' (Album-Oriented Rock, modelled on underground FM) FM formats became key to the industry's growth through the 1970s. See Fornatale and Mills (1980: 119ff.).

9. Thanks to Charles Acland for calling my attention to this article.

10. This suggests a contrast between a more youth-oriented view of albums as displaying a greater 'commercial' logic (filler as a means of extracting more profit from consumers) versus a more adult-oriented conception of albums as following an 'artistic' logic (with the 'concept' album appearing as the ultimate refusal of the commercial imperatives of the cultural industries). Of course, differing temporal logics play central roles in constructing different perceptions of the degree of 'commercialism' or 'artistry' associated with each commodity form.

11. See Willman (2003) for a contemporary performer's perspective on this. Asked the question, 'Are we looking at the death of the album as an art form if buyers can cherry-pick one or two songs at a time online?', the response from Dave Matthews (of the Dave Matthews Band) suggests a keen awareness of the links between adults and albums: 'One of the reasons we haven't gone with iTunes yet is because we want people to buy the whole record [and not just individual songs] . . . when they're 15, they want one song. When they're 18 or 22, they're, "Well, what's the rest of the album like?"' (quoted in Willman, 2003: 42; interpolation in original).

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