

# Too Much Too Young

Popular music, age and gender

Sheila Whiteley

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*Too Much Too Young* explores the relationship between popular music, age and gender, examining the role of youth and youthfulness through a series of themed case studies. Sheila Whiteley begins by investigating the exploitation of young artists such as Brenda Lee and Michael Jackson, offering a psychoanalytic reading of the relationship between child star and oppressive manager, and looks at the current glut of boy- and girl-bands and solo performers in the mould of Britney Spears, to examine the continuing fatal fascination of stardom for adolescents.

Whiteley then considers the reception of female singer-songwriters Kate Bush, Tori Amos and Björk, whose 'little girl' voices and characterisation by the media suggest a girlish femininity which is often at odds with the intentions of their musical output. She then moves on to explore the rock/pop divide as it affects the image of male performers, considering why male stars usually fall into the category of 'wild boys' such as Jim Morrison and Jimi Hendrix, or 'nice boys' such as Cliff Richard, The Monkees and Wham! Whiteley ends by asking what happens to artists when they begin to age; why death has bestowed iconic status upon rock musicians; and why the manipulation of youthfulness has been integral to the careers of pop artists such as Kylie Minogue and Cher.

**Sheila Whiteley** is Chair of Popular Music at the University of Salford.

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For Graham and Milli

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Tori Amos (request permission to use)

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‘Silent All These Years’ (*Little Earthquakes* 1992) East West

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'I'm Sorry' (1960) Decca

Jim Morrison (request permission to use)

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'LA Woman' (*LA Woman* 1971) Elektra

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Rolling Stones, 'Some Girls' (*Some Girls* 1978) Rolling Stones

Skunk Anansie, 'Twisted (Everyday Hurts)' (*Stoosh* 1996) One Little Indian

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# Introduction

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In June 1957 Brenda Lee, ‘the little girl with grown up reactions’ released her single ‘Dynamite’. Recorded when she was 13 years old, her vocal delivery abounds with an overtly physical and self-conscious sexual energy that belies her age. What makes her ‘sexy’ is the sense of ‘knowingness’ behind what might appear to be innocent lyrics, the erotic pause before a punch line pregnant with innuendo – ‘one hour of love tonight just knocks me out like dynamite’, with the inference of post-orgasmic exhaustion. I was 16 when the song was released and thought little about the exploitation of young vocalists. Rather, I wondered how someone so young could be so confident, so popular. She obviously possessed that special ‘something’ that singled her out as ‘star’ potential, a quality shared by such other young performers as Helen Shapiro who, as a 14-year-old school girl scored her first UK Top 3 hit with ‘Don’t Treat Me Like A Child’ and whose deep intonation again belied her age. My reaction, then, was more likely to have been ‘Lucky them!’ rather than ‘sexploitation’. With age and experience – not least the legacy of feminism and feminist theory and its concern with child abuse – I am more cynical. The erotic potential and appeal of children, not least the attraction of what can be described as an adult performance by a child, continues to exert a questionable appeal. In the profit-driven world of advertising, fashion and music, the image and culture of the young are appropriated for the high pleasure quotient they evoke. Youthful appeal and sexual allure are marketable commodities and are consumed today not simply by teens and adults but equally by the growing market of tweenies, the 8–10 year-olds who make up the majority fan base for girl and boy bands. Fame, however, comes at a cost and as Dr Michelle Elliott of the Children’s Charity Kidscape states: ‘We have found that with most child stars their journey into adulthood isn’t successful. Children need to be children’ (Le Vay, 2003, 6).

My initial concern, when researching *Too Much Too Young*, was to examine the problems concerning the exploitation of young musicians. Not least, I wanted to explore the relationship between image, age and musical performance (choice of songs, vocal style) that situated the artist as problematic, as inviting questionable pleasures in their audience. This, in turn, necessitated an understanding of the concept and definition of ‘child’ and the extent to which this is

considered a socially constructed condition rather than one that can be defined objectively with reference to chronological age. My reading here was informed both by sociological texts and, more specifically, the writings of Marina Warner (1994a and 1994b), Angela Carter (1979, 1981, 2000) and Sarah Maitland (1993). Here I found a shared interest in mythology and fairytale, subjects that have interested me for many years, not least for the ways in which they highlight the significance of dialogics and the understanding that ‘meaning is situated both socially and historically, that it works through dialogue – echoes, traces, contrasts, responses – both with previous discursive moments and, at the same time, with addressees real or imagined’ (Middleton, 2000, 13). While this is most apparent in the relationship of rock to the Dionysian cult of excess, it became increasingly apparent that artists such as Kate Bush explored and celebrated female archetypes and iconography, drawing on mythology, history, literature, Arthurian legend and Jungian psychology for provisional identities, using femininity as a cipher of masks and poses. Stereotyped for her ‘little girl’ voice and characterised as singing with the insatiability of a child who has not yet learnt to curb her voracious desires, it became apparent that childlikeness (and its associations with simplicity and guilelessness) and childishness (in adults, often construed as emotionally immature and prone to petulant outbursts) was associated with girlish femininity, a characteristic shared by Tori Amos and Björk.

My interest in the exploitation of child stars was thus extended to a more general concern with the stereotyping of ‘Little Girls’ and the ways in which images have a fundamental influence on our preconceptions regarding the nature of women. To an extent, this can be accounted for by the artist’s personal vocal style. As Simon Frith observes, ‘femininity, as vocal performance, centres around gendered emotions’ (1988, 155), and the yelps, howls and screams of anguish that have been described as constituting childish outburst, coupled with a characterisation by the media as childlike, winsome and otherworldly, are both contributory factors in identifying Bush, Amos and Björk as archetypal ‘Little Girls’. It is apparent, however, that all three artists possess quite remarkable vocal ranges, of which ‘childlike’ is but one, and that their vocal delivery relates primarily to their artistic role as storytellers, looking before and after, referring to past events and wisdom, and envisaging the future in light of these interpretations. Again, it is this sense of dialogics that draws into association mythological imagery, the erotic imagination and the feminine within. ‘Little Girls’, then, is a problematic concept in its relation to image, identity and musical delivery, reflecting the different ways of culturally defining women within a history of what is meant by femininity, and how mythology has articulated a cultural sense of what it is to be a woman ‘through a celebration of sexuality in both its joyous and darkest manifestations’ (McEwan in Carter, 1979, back cover).

The tensions between the erotic (from the Greek *eros*, love or the creative principle) and the thanatic (from the Greek *thanatos*, death or the destructive

principle) have been important to my discussion of 'Little Girls' and 'Little Boys'. Not least, the flights of fantasy that inform, for example, Jim Morrison's Oedipal psychodrama 'The End' (1967) relate both to the mythological and to the liberation of passions that result in death and rebirth. This emphasis on the thanatic is also present in Tori Amos's *a capella* account of her rape in 'Me And A Gun', and in Kate Bush's 'Waking the Witch' (1985) which explores the fate of a young woman condemned as 'guilty, guilty, guilty' through fractured electronic sounds and imagery which evoke the horror of exorcism and torture. This sense of violence as spectacle can be traced in classical mythology, in biblical texts, in the chronicles of history; its legitimisation through state and religion can be found in the continuing history of prostitution, rape, 'foot binding, suttee, purdah, clitoridectomy, witch-burning and gynecology' (Tong, 1992, 5), as well as in the rites of passage that can accompany a boy's journey into adulthood where some form of mutilation (including circumcision and/or tribal scarring) accompanies manhood. For the artist, it relates to the ways in which fiction and fantasy inform the imaginary and the actual concerns of life, and how fear, terror and outrage can be recast and reclaimed. The inner and outer, the mythologised monster, the martyred corpse and the raped woman are thus drawn together through the telling of the story, which in turn becomes both a text of inspiration and a text of sado-masochism.

The 'telling of the story', then, is crucial to its interpretation and advertisements, and mainstream films, videos and popular music promos reflect the slippery divide between pulp romance and soft-core and beyond. Research into slasher movies, whereby scenes of extreme violence are juxtaposed with some sort of erotic prelude, reveals a curious comparability with, for example, the storytelling tactics of Boccaccio's *Decameron* or, more overtly, the Marquis de Sade. 'The speed and ease with which one's feelings can be transformed from sensuality into viciousness may surprise even those quite conversant with the links between sexual and violent urges' (Maslin, 1982, 2). It is also a ploy in heavy metal, where themes often centre around fantasy, death, 'black' or satanic subjects, and where power chords, intense hard-driven beats and an emphasis on violence create a mood of aggressive sexuality:

Gut-wrenching frenzy  
 That deranges every joint  
 I'm gonna force you at gun point  
 To eat me alive...

(Judas Priest, 'Eat Me Alive')

The distinction between love of life (*eros*) and love of death (*thanatos*) is problematic. Both evoke and celebrate sensuality – the erotic its joyous, the thanatic its darkest manifestations. Both work in the imagination, but it is arguably the case that the liberation of passions can lead to 'refinements of pleasure, of ecstasies of perception, of courtesies and reciprocities undreamed'

(Byatt, 1997, 204), and hence to the liberation of those passions which take pleasure in the hurt of others. Within human nature, the worship of Death and the worship of Beauty and Pleasure are not necessarily distinct. The one can have an uneasy and perverse relationship to the other. Indeed, it is difficult not to surmise that 'shameful things, shameful secrets, desires suppressed with violence (which) are kept secret and separate ... fester in body and brain' (Byatt, 1997, 65). You cannot unsee what you have seen. You cannot unhear what you have heard.

As A.S. Byatt writes, we

are children of a time and culture which mistrusted love, 'in love', romantic love, romance *in toto*, and which nevertheless in revenge proliferated sexual language, linguistic sexuality, analysis, dissection, deconstruction, exposure ... (We are) theoretically knowing: ... (we know) about phallos-racy and penisid, punctuation, puncturing and penetration, about polymorphous and polysemous perversity, orality, good and bad breasts, clitoral tumescence, vehicle persecution, the fluids, the solids, the metaphors for these, the systems of desire and damage, infantile greed and oppression and transgression, the iconography of the cervix and the imagery of the expanding and contracting body, desired, attacked, consumed, feared.

(1991, 423)

The ritualisation of the thanatic and its relationship to rites of passage provided a particular trajectory for my discussion of 'Little Boys' and rock culture. Whereas women musicians have had to 'find their own voices', investing both their identity and experience in their music, stressing individuality rather than lineage, estrangement rather than belonging, 'Little Boys' are burdened by the legacy of the founding members of generic dynasties. While this is most apparent in rock, it is nevertheless evident that each genre carries with it particular conventions based both on image and musical characteristics (including performance style) and that these impose a particular, and often constraining, framework. Age, it seems, is particularly relevant here, and, for the rock genre, it carries with it a mythology built on excess which is realised either metaphorically or in reality, by death. In contrast, 'nice boys' are doomed to be the quintessential 'boy-next-door', unthreatening, romantic and uncontaminated by the Dionysian addiction to drugs, drink and sexual excess.

The question is thus raised as to who controls the destiny of young stars and why these destructive frameworks continue to dictate the rules of the game. What happens to popular music's old girls and old boys when they exit the fast lane of superstardom, and how can death become such an exploitable commodity?

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## Analysis of musical examples

The artists included in *Too Much Too Young* were selected primarily for their significance in opening out the principal debates in the three main sections of my book. A secondary consideration concerned accessibility, i.e. whether their recordings are still available. As a reader, I know there is nothing more irritating than being guided towards a particular book or recording and finding it no longer available. As all of my case studies refer to particular songs and/or albums, this criteria has been important. However, it is perhaps an indication of their perceived value that the artists under discussion continue to assume an important presence in popular music. This is evidenced by the remastering of albums as CDs, which has meant that early tracks by, for example, Brenda Lee, have provided both old and new fans with access to 'Little Miss Dynamite',

In general, my interpretative approach situates the analysis of the music itself within a cultural-critical framework that responds to, and engages with, a wide range of literature. The case studies themselves are situated within a social and historical context and in relation to popular music styles and genres. This is, I believe, significant. An analysis of rock, for example, will privilege certain stylistic elements, not least the role of lead and rhythm guitar, and the synergy between bass and drums. In contrast, ballads (which draw on folk song, drawing room, Tin Pan Alley and light opera) 'are focused texturally on certain types of flowing, long-breathed lyricism and tend to use sophisticated chains of harmonies (rather than the repeated cycles of simple chord-sequences that are characteristic of up-tempo pop songs and Punk)'. Even so, within this broad commonality, it is possible to 'distinguish "rock ballads", "country ballads", "soul ballads", "pop ballads", all of which bring with them "genre synecdoches" (defined as from inside one musical style to elements of another, thence to the genre of which the second style is part) and "style indicators"' (Middleton, 1997, 37). Group singing, for example, is significant within boy and girl groups and this is reflected in, for example, call-and-response, familiar from black musical traditions, or in the close harmony of fifties vocal groups and nineties boy bands, or in a varied mixture of the two, as in the Beatles.<sup>1</sup> What is significant here is that the stylistic identity of a genre can mutate over time, not least in today's musical climate of increasing hybridity.

While my musical analysis is sensitive to both stylistic and generic conventions, I am also concerned with the unique elements of an artist's style and the ways in which s/he engages with the musical parameters of melody, harmony, rhythm, texture, form and, where important, production. I am also concerned with the ways in which a singer expresses a particular perspective through the narrative of the lyrics, the vocabulary used, and how this relates to the vocal gesture and melodic phrasing. The formal details of the musical analysis are opened out by a more interpretative focus which relates the lyrics to their dramatic function as in, for example, the tensions between the singer's voice and the supporting musical texture, and to the broader context of, for example,

personal trauma in many of the songs by Tori Amos, or the literary and mythological references in songs by Kate Bush and Jim Morrison. My analysis here is centred largely on extramusical meanings which relate to the concept of 'dialogics – echoes, traces, contrasts, responses – both with previous discursive moments and, at the same time, with addressees real or imagined' (Middleton, 2000, 13), as discussed previously. This means that 'its signifying stream ... is always multivoiced' and that 'meanings are produced through dialogue at many levels' (Middleton, 2000, 13). There is, then, no fixed or absolute meaning when interpreting the songs under discussion, but biographies of the artists suggest that my readings are relevant to the points raised.

### **An overview of the book**

*Too Much Too Young* has three main sections. **Part I**, Nursery Crymes,<sup>2</sup> explores the problems surrounding the eroticising of the child star. Prefaced by a discussion of the condition of childhood and the conceptualisation of innocence that underpins the contemporary paradox of both containing child sexuality and accepting its exploitation through, for example, the media, my first case study is based on Brenda Lee. Nicknamed 'Little Miss Dynamite' when she first began recording for Decca at the age of eleven, her status as a pre-pubescent child whose sexually potent songs inferred an implicit maturity and her marketed image of a 'little girl with grown up reactions', the delivery of her songs was arguably at odds with her actual image of a diminutive, curly-haired child.

My discussion of Brenda Lee is opened out by reference to other representations of eroticised children, from the nineteenth century through to the present day. This includes a discussion of Lewis Carroll, whose fascination, and suppressed desire, for the innocent world of the child was equalled only by his desire to 'escape from the improper implications of passion introduced into his world by the adult women around him' (Dijkstra, 1986, 189). His photography of 'adorable little girls in the full innocence of their nudity' (Dijkstra, 1986, 189) included Alice Liddell, the real Alice whose fictional adventures were chronicled in *Alice in Wonderland* and *Alice Through the Looking Glass*. My discussion of child sexuality in fine art and the reality of child prostitution in the nineteenth century is then given a more contemporary focus in the debates surrounding Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* (1959). As Jeremy Irons (who played Humbert Humbert in Adrian Lynes' film of the book) explains: 'Its power comes from moments when you want the love between the man and the girl to succeed, when their happiness seems untouchable' (Hasted, 1998, 4). It is evident, however, that *Lolita* skirts a thin line between pornography and so-called 'art' movies in that it both provokes debate, forcing the viewer to reassess his relation to his own sexuality, while engaging with libidinous fantasy.

Today, there is a curious silence from progressive and other radical cultural workers about the ways in which children and sex are portrayed in films, advertising and media culture in general (Giroux, 1998, 47). While such images are

not necessarily pornographic, they can nevertheless invite questionable pleasures in their audience. And this, I believe, is the problem surrounding the careers of young artists such as Brenda Lee.

My second case study concerns the career of Michael Jackson, arguably the most visible of all child stars mutated by fame. His 40 years as a performer has seen his transition from a child star to a childlike star who continues to embody the Peter Pan qualities associated with the boy who refuses the pathway to adulthood. Dominated by two father-figures, Joseph Jackson (his real-life father) and Berry Gordy (the boss of Tamla Motown), his perverse personality and increasingly mask-like features problematise his Afro-American origins through a blanched and overly-taut skin, so suggesting an attempt to abolish both masculinity and any resemblance to his abusive father.

My analysis of Jackson draws on Freud, most specifically his identification of the *phallic* stage and the boy child's attempt to resolve the Oedipus complex, and Lacan's discussion of sexuality as structured around the primary symbol of cultural authority. It is here that Jackson's confused metamorphoses, his attempts to achieve an idealised image, a totality out of its disparate parts, can be interpreted both as a challenge to the omnipotent phantom of his father and as a contemporary realisation of the story of 'The Picture of Dorian Gray'. Gray's face, like the mask that is now Jackson's face, is illusory. The story expresses a will to stay forever young. The concept of metamorphoses and masquerade is further explored through Michael Jackson's video and single, 'Thriller'. This is opened out through a critical appraisal of Kobena Mercer's seminal article 'Monster metaphors: notes on Michael Jackson's Thriller' (1991). Jackson's metamorphosis into a wolf is related to Angela Carter's short stories in *The Bloody Chamber* (1979), and it is suggested that his mutation relates to his own identification with animals (rather than adult humans, as exemplified in his extensive collection of animals at his home 'Neverland') and to the injured childlike man behind the mask whose desire to remain ever-young has led increasingly to his problematic association with children. His second metamorphosis into a zombie, relates his transformation to an allegory of the parasitic, the non-stop media investigations into his image that led, increasingly, to his retreat into the fantasy-world of 'Neverland'. In summary, it is argued that Jackson remains a childlike star, living in a make-believe world, a small, seemingly vulnerable person who affirms the 'connection with that childhood Eden in which the Lost Boys are still living, defying the death of the child within' (Warner, 1994b, 43).

While Jackson was seemingly incapable of resolving the Oedipal complex, Jim Morrison (my third case study) confronts his desire to 'kill the father' and 'fuck the mother' in his chilling Oedipal psychodrama 'The End'. Like Jackson, Morrison was profoundly alienated from his father, and his feeling of estrangement was informed not only by his identification with the Beat poet Jack Kerouac, the writer William Burroughs and the philosopher Norman O. Brown, but also by his growing reliance on LSD, which, in 1965, was both plentiful and legal in California. As the Oedipal myth reveals, the only way for a son to

achieve power is to rid himself of the father, and the song provides a primal and emotive evocation of Morrison's urge to separate himself from his past in order to control his present and future.

While Joseph Jackson and George Morrison provide two examples of the effects of extreme paternal authority, my fourth case study explores the destructive drives inherent in Malcolm McLaren's manipulative management of Annabella Lwin, the 14-year-old lead singer of the 1980s pop group, Bow Wow Wow. Here, my discussion is opened out with reference to McLaren's earlier management of the Sex Pistols, his proposed promotional film for the Slits, and his early draft script for *The Great Rock 'n' Roll Swindle* (a collaboration with Julian Temple on the story of the Sex Pistols). McLaren's management of Bow Wow Wow had involved a transformation of lead singer Annabella, who was photographed semi-nude on an album-sleeve pastiche of Manet's *Dejeuner sur l'Herbe* (see [Part I](#) for copy of the sleeve). His aim was to project her as an embodiment of exotic, underage sex. Her image relates her not only to past inscriptions of black and other ethnic groups within colonial and post-colonial discourse but, as I explain, the continuing problem of the child within pornography and prostitution. McLaren's exploitation of Annabella is, then, highly problematic, and reflects what Simon Reynolds describes as his five-year transition from 'a neo-Situationist agent provocateur to a dirty old man' (Reynolds and Press, 1995, 42).

Nursery Crymes concludes with a brief survey of other child stars who have suffered under the patriarchal dictates of music management. In particular, I draw attention to the ways in which looks and image continue to dominate the careers of would-be pop idols, and the continuing fatal attraction of stardom for adolescent wannabes.

[Part II](#) deals with the stereotyping of 'Little Girls' and the ways in which images have a fundamental influence on our preconceptions regarding the nature of women. I begin with a consideration of the term 'girl' and how it has been inscribed within different genres of popular music. While the specifics of genres are context-dependent, it is apparent that the conceptualisation of 'girl' is inscribed within the common sense of stereotype and cliché. Thus, while the misogynistic of heavy rock/metal inscribes 'girl' as an unproblematic sex object, the more romantic evocations of, for example, the Beatles, relate more to the traditional attributes of femininity: empathy, supportiveness, gentleness, tenderness and unselfishness. Both extremes remind us that the codes we live by (not least those concerning sex/sexuality/gender) are neither natural nor innocent, and that terms such as 'girl' are grounded in the common sense of everyday discourse where they emerge as a site of contradiction, conflict and tension.

My three case studies explore a specific example of the inscription of 'Little Girl' within popular music discourse. Here, my earlier discussion of 'little girls with grown up reactions' shifts to women whose 'little-girl voices' and characterisation by the media as winsome and otherworldly suggests a girlish femininity which is often at odds with the intentions of their musical output. My three case studies, Kate Bush, Tori Amos and Björk explore the conceptuali-

sation of their girlish femininity and, hence, the preconceptions concerning the nature of 'liddle girls'. What my analysis demonstrates is that all three artists possess quite remarkable vocal ranges, of which the 'childlike' is but one, and that their vocal delivery relates primarily to their artistic roles as storytellers.

My discussion of Kate Bush begins with a detailed analysis of her first single, 'Wuthering Heights' (1978), the promo for her debut album, *The Kick Inside*. Its impact is undoubtedly due to the ethereal quality of the vocal, which resonates with the dementia of Cathy, the star-crossed heroine of Emily Brontë's gothic novel. In particular, the seemingly unnaturally high register of Bush's vocal line, which assumes both childlike qualities in its purity of tone and an underlying eroticism in its sinuous melodic contours and obsessive vocalised femininity, provides the first indication of her ability to create a new kind of feminised language in popular music. Bush's struggle with femininity is explored further in my discussion of her second album, *Lionheart*, where I return to the conceptualisation of Peter Pan earlier explored in my analysis of Michael Jackson. For Jackson, his identification with Peter Pan relates to his refusal to grow up, his desire to remain in the fantastic world of 'Neverland'. For Bush, the groundedness of being a girl, the reality of a future where the fun has been taken out of life and where understanding comes with age, is challenged by the recognition that freedom comes with retaining and exploring childlike dreams and refusing domesticity, as embodied in the 'full eyes' but 'empty face' in her mirror image. To free herself of the image of the eroticised girl pop artist that dominated her reviews she has to fly, and the imaginary provides a way of transcending the conflicts of gender and the constrictions of being 'EMI's daughter'. Childhood fantasy, however, has to be tempered with reality. The music business was, and largely remains, a man's world and 'to fly' an artist has to be capable of using her own physicality as a resource and to redefine herself against the limitations of femininity. Her solution was to take more control over her career, forming her own publishing and management companies (Kate Bush Music and Novercia) with herself as managing director and her family on the board of directors.

*Never For Ever* (1980), her first Number One album, was co-produced by Bush and John Kelly. She also wrote and arranged the songs, performing vocals, piano and harmonies, and is pictured on the album sleeve with a multitude of flying creatures and mythological beasts, flying bat-like on the back cover which was conceived and photographed by her brother, John Carder Bush. The songs cover the vocal spectrum characteristic of Bush: the childlike embodied in 'The Infant Kiss' and 'Army Dreamers', the punk-driven dementia (comparable to the Banshee-like screams of Siouxsie Sioux) of 'Violin', and the dramatic poignancy of 'Breathing' with its Floyd-like outro. To an extent, the album provides a retrospective on her compositional output to date in its rich melodicism and sense of drama. *The Dreaming*, released two years later in 1982, is altogether different, heavily percussive and fraught with a wild, angry emotion. It was her 'she's gone mad'<sup>3</sup> album but while it was her least successful in the UK, it attracted attention in America where it was hailed as a musical tour de force.

After a two-year hiatus, Bush released *Hounds of Love* (1985), a work that is arguably her greatest to date. The gap between her albums was recognised by fans and critics alike as a sign of creative effort and praise of her ability to produce as well as to write her own music is reflected in reviews by, for example, *Digital Audio*. Across pop history, recordings are characterised by their sound quality and ‘artists and producers have enjoyed considerable scope for personal expression and experimentation when composing and recording music in the studio’ (Negus, 1992, 91). All genres have their conventions, but with the significance given to the voice – which most explicitly expresses a performer’s personality and aurally signals their presence within the music – it is not too surprising that Bush should become obsessive in producing a sound quality that was comparable to the dramatic conception of her own vocal qualities and range. *Hounds of Love* is characterised not only by its expansive and dramatic sense of soundscaping, but equally by its sculpting of individual sound moments. Whereas *The Dreaming* suggested an obsessively over-produced album, *Hounds of Love* evidences Bush’s ability to transform the emotional content of the songs into a well-balanced whole, showcasing her skills as both a competent engineer and as someone who has a mastery of synthesisers and sequencers, so demonstrating an ability to both draw on established techniques while exploring the possibilities offered by new technologies. The result was a well-crafted album, which revealed her strengths not only as a writer and singer but, most crucially for a woman, as a producer. Above all, it is sensual in its erotic play on sounds and images that both transform and situate the lyrics and vocal line within an often metaphysical and otherworldly soundscape.

Her follow-up album, *The Sensual World* (1989), provided further opportunity for evocative and unusual arrangements and choice of instrumentation and is considered Bush’s most explicitly female-identified statement. This is reflected, most specifically in the title track, which traces feminine speech back to Molly Bloom’s soliloquy from the close of James Joyce’s *Ulysses*. Contextualised by uilleann pipes, fiddle and bouzouki, the non-verbal is explored through exotic and sensuous textures which link the chaos of the inner world to the feminine of Nature. *The Red Shoes* (1993) is, at the time of writing, Kate Bush’s last recorded album and evokes a sense of nostalgia. ‘Moments of Pleasure’ draws on memories of ‘Wuthering Heights’ in its soaring ‘Just being alive/It can really hurt’. ‘You’re the One’ again has a reflexive nod backwards to ‘Wuthering Heights’ in the melodic line ‘She’s no good for you baby’, a comparable vocal tone, ‘Take me up to the top of the city’, and high vocal register, ‘And I don’t mind if it’s dangerous’. Above all, the album sets out what appeared to be a personal agenda, the ‘Song of Solomon’ juxtaposes the ecstatic of love (I’ll be your Rose of Sharon, Lilly of the Valley) against the realistic ‘Don’t want your bullshit, just want your sexuality’; the ‘why should I love you (of all the people in the world)’, and the not wanting to leave of ‘You’re the One’.

Bush's 'errant individualism' (O'Brien, 1995, 188) has placed her at the forefront of the singer-songwriter tradition. More specifically, she exemplifies one of only a few female performers who have fulfilled the role of composer and producer, so allowing her flights of erotic fantasy full rein. Her compositions address both the specific subjugation and revitalisation of women's experience, drawing on the tensions between representation and its relationship to history, ideology and culture; marginalisation and its impact on cultural self-expression; and the urge to create and articulate personal perspectives and points of view. Not least, her construction of images and the different ways of culturally defining women reflects both a history of what is meant by femininity, and the ways in which mythology and fairytale have articulated a cultural sense of what it is to be a woman. Her music, then, can be characterised as both a strategy of difference and a strategy of defiance, and its otherworldly imagery and neo-gothic sound was, for many years, one of the few alternatives to girl pop.

While my discussion of Kate Bush has been informed by the mythological, my second case study, Tori Amos, deals with personal experience at its most extreme. I begin with an analysis of 'Me And A Gun' and 'Silent All These Years' from her debut album, *Little Earthquakes* (1992). Both explore painful memories, working through feelings of victimisation and so giving vent to the pent-up negativity that characterises victims of rape. Her performance can thus be interpreted as both personal catharsis and as a way of identifying Amos as part of the continuing history of women who have negotiated the problems surrounding violence and oppression. This sense of dialogics is equally evident in her second album, *Under the Pink* (1994), which reflects on the emotional violence between women, rather than between the sexes, the 'pecking order, which men don't usually see' (St. Michael, 1996, 88). This is most evident in 'The Waitress', where dissonant electronic effects and reverse samples on cymbal effect a dramatic underpinning for her declamatory 'I want to kill', and the issues surrounding victimisation and retribution in 'Cornflake Girl'. There is also a continuing tussle with the metaphysical, this time God rather than his Son, in the promo from the album. Characterised as self-centred and, perhaps, a little crazy, the sense of a Christian, 'westernised' God is extended in the accompanying video where live rats crawl over Amos's body, and where large snakes symbolically evoke the perverse communion between Eve and the devil. Religion, hypocrisy and rejection are explored further in 'Icicle', through a challenging composition that confronts female autoeroticism. In doing so, Amos provides a feminised account of the ways in which women are sexualised, victimised and ultimately disabled by the moral imperatives of the church, and where her body (and those of countless women before her) becomes a battlefield in the fight for liberation.

Among the final tracks on the album, 'Space Dog' and 'Anastasia', provide a showcase for Amos's virtuoso piano playing and evoke the epic drama of the Romantic tone poem. While they evidence her ability to orchestrate, to develop ideas and stretch her abilities as a composer, they lack the sense of

intimacy and spontaneity of her more evocative songs. They also raise questions of 'just how long does a little girl remain a little girl'. My discussion of *Boys for Pele* (1996) opens out this debate through an analysis of 'Hey Jupiter', which reflects on the emotions surrounding relationships, while demonstrating that Amos's self-characterisation has moved to a more mature, but equally tempestuous femininity. This sense of a personal journey is extended in *from the choirgirl hotel* (1998) in tracks that partly explore the traumas surrounding her miscarriage and the problems surrounding drug addiction.

Amos's ability to sculpt her music around the lyrics, to work with varied textures and to explore her personal development through songs which relate to the full colour spectrum of her transition from 'little girl' to woman relates strongly to her underlying strength of purpose. It is a characteristic that is shared by Björk, my third case study, yet it seems that the press have consistently paid more attention to her appearance, her wildness and her elfin image than to a serious consideration of her quite exceptional musical talent. To an extent this is not surprising. Björk has always looked unconventional, different, and has played on her image across her musical career, from the Icelandic elf characteristic of her early techno days, through to the bleached hair and self-styled kookie image of 1996, and beyond to the exotic of the geisha on *Homogenic* (1997), and the emergent swan-like figure of *Vespertine* (2001). My analysis of Björk explores this transition in relation to her music, drawing particular attention to the ways in which she uses the flexibility of her vocal range, from the mischief of her often quirky delivery, through to the poetic and melodically eloquent.

I begin with a discussion of *Debut* (1993), for which she teamed up with Nellee Hooper (producer) and Marius De Vries (programmer) to produce an album which resonated with the House-inflected imagination of the early 1990s. The album is authoritative in its contemporary feel, and the repetitive grooves and often seamless rhythms of the tracks allow Björk a certain indulgence in her vocal delivery, which is often rhythmically erratic. At the same time, it provides a particular insight into her idiosyncratic shaping of words, the concentration on the syllabic quality of sounds, the upward yodels, and the emphasis on individual consonants and vowels. In common with both Bush and Amos, Björk has a personalised feel for language which often relates to her state of mind when writing, and which moves from aggression through to a defencelessness associated with her 'little girl' voice. Her broken English is also used to good effect in opening out a sense of aloneness and linguistic frustration, attributable both to her move to England and her subsequent tours abroad. It seems, however, that there is an underlying knowingness about her seemingly childlike delivery. Her tone often conceals a hidden chuckle, while her occasional growling 'rrr's' confirm her identity as exotically different, as in the classic House feel of track 4, 'There's More To Life Than This'. Above all, Björk's love of words seems to resonate with her multifaceted personality, whether this is hardcore industrial or the poetic eloquence of 'Venus As A Boy', where there is