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**"I'm Not a Juvenile Delinquent": 1950s Rock 'n' roll, youth under threat, and good citizenship in
US exploitation cinema 1956-59**

ABSTRACT

The jukebox musical, a format of youth-oriented film based on performances of well-known rock 'n' roll artists, found considerable popularity in the late 1950s. In response to the commercial rise of youth oriented popular music, jukebox musicals modulated the ways in which they portrayed rock 'n' roll and its perceived social and moral effects on the young. This article concentrates on the most intense period of this activity, 1956-59, in which we describe filmic narratives as moving through classic, transitional, and secure phases. Select films of US production companies are thematically analysed to reveal the evolution of rock 'n' roll narratives using two key tropes of rock being a threat to youth wellbeing as well as catalyst for good citizenship. This article demonstrates the tension between a developing youth music market, social values, and filmic representation during this significant period of popular music history.

Keywords: jukebox musical; rock 'n' roll; youth; film; citizenship

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INTRODUCTION

Blackboard Jungle (Brooks, MGM), released in March of 1955, famously signals the moment where for the first time a rock 'n' roll song - Bill Haley and the Comets' 'Rock Around the Clock' - is used on a film soundtrack. The song plays over the opening credits (written on a blackboard) and continues diegetically as the opening scene commences. In the initial scenes, lead character Richard Dadier (Glenn Ford) arrives for a job interview at inner city North Manual High School. The school is a dumping ground for delinquent and largely non-white students who dance aggressively with one another, openly smoke cigarettes in the school yard, and indiscriminately sexually harass male and female adults. The school yard is represented as a cage which only just manages to contain these threatening "animals". Rock 'n' roll is explicitly linked with the threat posed by juvenile delinquency, a kind of primal force which the school and its teachers seek, with enormous difficulty, to manage and control.

In stark contrast is Zugsmith's late 1959 release *Girls Town* (Haas 1959). Rock 'n' roll – delivered via the mild-mannered Paul Anka - actively colludes with a kind of liberal, "muscular Christianity" (see Griffin 2013) in order to entertain and to rescue female juvenile delinquents. Rather than being represented as an *aspect* of delinquency, youth music here is one of the strategies by which delinquency is managed, brought under control and even reformed. The core plotlines underlying *Blackboard Jungle* and *Girls Town* pose the effects of rock 'n' roll in divergent ways to the viewer. In the former, rock 'n' roll is a threat to society, especially youth; in the latter, rock 'n' roll is used as a catalyst for good behaviour and citizenship, often finding itself under threat from authorities.

This article proposes an exploratory typology of rock 'n' roll exploitation films of the late 1950s, demonstrating how the changing social attitudes to rock 'n' roll developed over the years 1956 to 1959 in tandem with the genre's sustained influence in the American music charts. In this article we draw attention to the "jukebox musical", a sub-genre of exploitation cinema, as the key site of development for narratives concerning rock 'n' roll and the theme of the threat of delinquency and its dialectical inverse – good behaviour and citizenship. Exploitation films were made cheaply, quickly and in great numbers by independent filmmakers; they were designed to be profitable by incorporating topical content and

reflective of current youth culture trends (Schaeffer 1992, Davis 2012, Clark 2013). They were particularly popular with the growing “teenage” market who possessed increasing disposable income in the 1950s. The jukebox musical comprised performances of up to 20 songs from currently popular artists loosely linked by a narrative usually a group of youths, and their community, and on some occasions the artists themselves.

Various versions of rock 'n' roll history account for the shift in social attitudes towards the genre in the late 1950s through its domestication by such sanitized stars as Paul Anka, Bobby Darin, and Neil Sedaka (see for example Palmer 1995: 32-33, Campbell 2008: 124-126, Covach 2009: 93-97). We assert a more thorough understanding of youth and popular culture in the period can be gleaned from the filmic evidence of the time. Key authors Mundy (1999), Doherty (2002), Dickinson (2008), and James (2016) provide extremely valuable and convincing “thick descriptions” of the social and industrial contexts concerning the nexus between teen audiences and popular culture through cinema. Due to their broad scope, this literature, necessarily, has not focussed on the fine-grained evolutionary changes in rock ‘n’ roll exploitation films during these key years 1956-1959. For example, Dickinson provides a persuasive discussion of *Untamed Youth* (Koch, Devonshire 1957) in terms of tensions produced by the migration of black agricultural workers into cities in the 1950s. She comments on the ending of the film: “in a bizarre alternative and largely uncontextualized citation of African diaspora culture and its geographical loci, the tale ends when Penny (Mamie van Doren) performs “Go Calypso” in a mock Caribbean accent, on a television show” (2008, p. 49). Analysing from a top-down socio-economic perspective, Dickinson misses the rather obvious point that the ending of the film signals no more than that Penny is riding the then current popularity of calypso music in the US pop charts. What we seek to add to the literature then, is a nuanced account of the development and transformation of jukebox musicals, in temporal relation to one another and with trends occurring in popular music. Accepting that this genre is a product of social and industrial forces, we assert that the nature of jukebox musicals was to respond quickly to current trends and can therefore be considered primary evidence signalling contemporary discourses of rock n roll almost immediately as they occurred.

RATIONALE AND METHOD

Blackboard Jungle was perhaps the only feature film of the 1950s to attempt to make a direct connection between delinquency and rock 'n' roll music. The real importance of this film, and the subsequent feature starring Bill Haley - *Rock Around the Clock* (Sears, Clover Productions, 1956) - is the fact that they facilitated the appearance of a series of films which sought to represent rock 'n' roll and correspondingly negotiate the delinquency/citizenship issue (see also Doherty 2002: 54-82; Denisoff and Romanowski 1990: 65-66; Ehrenstein and Reed 1982: 16-17). The success of *Rock Around the Clock* led to the immediate production of no less than four rock 'n' roll exploitation films produced by independent companies, all released in November/December of 1956.¹ This trend continued with the release of over 20 more rock 'n' roll features or jukebox musicals, mostly by independent companies through 1957-59 (films included in this article are listed in Figure 1). It is at this time the relationship between rock 'n' roll and the dialectic between youth as citizen and youth at risk is established. The years comprising the end of the 1950s are significant not only for the influence of exploitation films, but also because of the alignment of this phase with the history of rock 'n' roll, which reached a climax in 1959 with the simultaneous deaths of principal players Buddy Holly, the Big Bopper and Richie Valens in a plane crash in the United States (later referred to by artist Don McLean in 1971 as "the day the music died"). After this point in popular music history, the early 1960s saw the rise of beach-themed surf rock (such as Dick Dale, The Delltones, and later, The Beach Boys), and the arrival of the British Invasion (i.e. Gerry and the Pacemakers, The Beatles). This is reflected in subsequent on-screen representations of the developing scope of popular music (See Doherty 2002: 145-186).

¹ Meanwhile, December 1956 saw the release of *The Girl Can't Help It* (Tashlin, Twentieth Century Fox), the first rock 'n' roll jukebox musical released by a major studio.

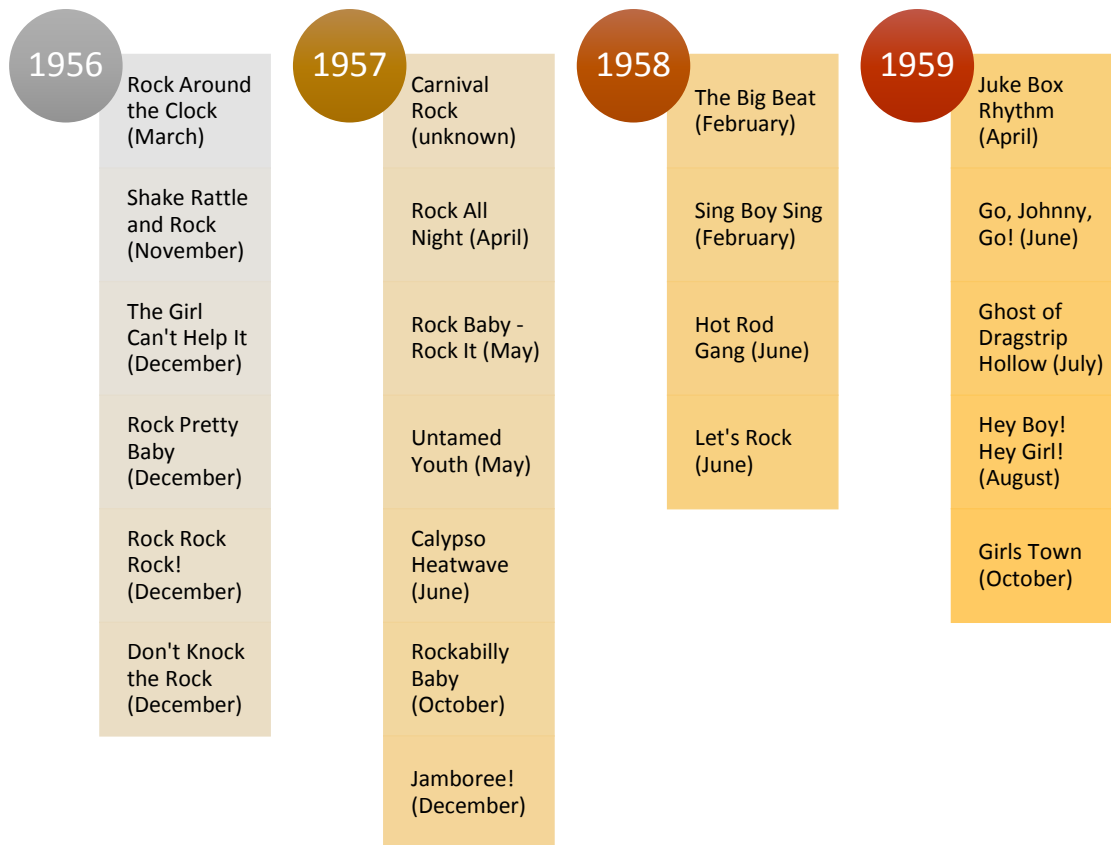


Figure 1: Timeline of jukebox musicals under review

This article conceptualises developments in 1950s rock ‘n’ roll exploitation films as belonging to three overlapping phases: a *foundational* phase in 1956 where the narrative of rock ‘n’ roll as a threat to social order or youth space is overcome by practices of good citizenship; an *intermediate* phase in 1957-58 which is characterized by a diversification of narratives, culminating in a set of films which represent rock ‘n’ roll, as a dominant force in the industry. Thirdly, we advocate a *secure* phase: a set of films made in 1959 where the genre demonstrated it was here to stay. This third phase suggests that ‘youth music’ and the cultural space of youth is securely established - it is no longer a threat, or under threat. These phases are overlapping due to the continued presence of *foundational* narratives throughout this time period; meanwhile, newer incarnations of the basic tropes of “threat” and “citizenship” are circulated through 1957-59.

In what follows, key films are analysed thematically in terms of plot lines, characters and underlying social and moral discourse. The films are compared chronologically in order to consider changes to key

themes over time. For reasons of scope and clarity, only films made by companies based in the United States are included in this analysis, but this is not to say that films made outside this domain or time frame did not impact social views of rock 'n' roll. Indeed, the United Kingdom and Europe experienced many of the same youth culture trends, however, the exploitation films produced in the US allow a particularly close reading of the ways in which this film industry changed tactics in response to developments in popular music at the time. The ensuing section clarifies and contextualises the jukebox musical, and the primary dualism of 'threat' and 'good citizenship' as thematic tropes is explained.

JUKEBOX MUSICALS: FORMAL FEATURES

We suggest that in the late 1950s three kinds of youth oriented popular music films were being produced in the US: Elvis Presley movies, the "social hygiene" film, and the jukebox musical. Though all three modes were designed to appeal to the youth market, each had a distinct set of values and discourses. Presley's numerous feature films (he starred in over 30) ran alongside his musical career (during the 1960s they largely *constituted* his musical career). In the 1950s they were designed to further his appeal to both older and younger audiences through a range of "loner protagonist finding a family" storylines in which Elvis plays a character, rather than himself (see Baker 2013). These movies, with a single artist performing almost all musical numbers, are not jukebox musicals, but it is important to acknowledge their presence especially in the late 1950s, as major studio, bigger budget competition to jukebox musicals. Social hygiene features were also produced by major studios, and examined the relationship between youth and a particular social problem while incorporating a few rock 'n' roll hits in the soundtrack. Films such as *Blackboard Jungle*, *High School Confidential!* (Arnold, Zugsmith, 1958), and *Blue Denim* (Dunne, Twentieth Century Fox, 1959) are examples of this trend, in which the narrative develops the social issue under examination, and rock 'n' roll tends to be used as diegetic or non-diegetic accompaniment to the onscreen action. These films were designed to deliver moral messages concerning issues such as violence, drugs, and teen sex; the addition of rock 'n' roll added some appeal to capture the youth market (see also Mundy 2002: 83-114).

In contrast to social hygiene films, the narratives of jukebox musicals function almost entirely to link the performance of rock 'n' roll songs, often by the original artists. The film itself is essentially a compilation of performances of around 15-20 complete songs by several different artists, in which the performances and their narrative contexts aspire to the illusion of realism by including scenes showing the live performance, the practice session, the recording studio or the electronic broadcast; in this sense roughly akin to the tradition of "backstage" musical described by Rick Altman (1987: 210-234). The subordination of narrative to performance is exemplified by consideration of the film with probably the thinnest narrative of all jukebox musicals, *Rock Baby - Rock It* (Sporup, Freebar, 1957), in which eighteen songs are performed by seven different artists from the local Dallas area. Blocks of narrative facilitate blocks of song performance in turn, which can be summarised as follows: teens are dancing in their club when the film's antagonists arrive to take over the club (the landlord also wants to evict the teens for late rent) (songs 1-2); the teens decide a benefit concert will help raise enough funds to keep the club and seek help from other clubs (songs 3-7). Meanwhile, some adult characters gain knowledge of the hoods' criminal activities and the leader is arrested after a fight with the teens (songs 8-11); the benefit concert is successful in aiding the teens' plight (songs 12-18). In moving the viewer from location to location in order to represent musical performance, the narrative quite literally sets up an occasion and provides a place for the performance of rock 'n' roll. Through the agency of narrative, rock 'n' roll both claims and asserts a space for itself. Jukebox musicals thus don't merely record musical performance, they provide an important self-reflexive mechanism by which rock 'n' roll claims and asserts its place both on screen and in the world.

KEY TROPES: THREAT AND CITIZENSHIP

The basis for our categorisation of rock 'n' roll exploitation films into three developmental phases lies in the changing narratives surrounding key tropes of "threat" and "citizenship" in relation to rock 'n' roll and the films' youth characters. At this point in popular music history, rock 'n' roll was often perceived as posing a direct threat to the wellbeing and prosperity of youth, and social order in general. The sexual and

otherwise immoral undertones of this music and many associated dances and fashions became the basis for rock 'n' roll to be considered a leading provocateur of "folk devils" in the latter half of the 20th century (see for example Cohen 1972/2002; Dotter 1994) and some jukebox musicals presented rock 'n' roll as this kind of threat. The idea of "threat" was also used in these films in a slightly different way; as outlined in the narrative of *Rock Baby - Rock It*, "youth space" (e.g. club houses) could also be "under threat" of abolition by bullies or authorities. In both "threat" scenarios, it is the demonstration of principles of "good citizenship" that saves the day.

Good citizenship was a significant behavioural expectation for all citizens, including young adults in post-World War One USA (Bodnar 1993). With the rise of the "teenage" life period in many Western countries in the 1950s, characterised by independence, increased sexual activity, liberal spending habits, the development of subcultures and listening to rock 'n' roll, came escalated "risk" that youth would be lead astray from the linear transition from education to work and family idealised in previous generations (see Brake 2013; Griffin 2013; Nilan, Julian and Germov 2007). Hence the key assumption that teenagers who could demonstrate appropriate citizenship tendencies such as responsibility, integrity, high moral standards, and community-mindedness, would become well-adjusted adults. In the narratives of jukebox musicals, these actions frequently involved the use of rock 'n' roll performance for the benefit of youth and the community. As evidenced in the typical storyline of *Rock Baby - Rock It*, a rock 'n' roll fundraiser saves the youth space from destruction, meanwhile the youthful organisers are praised for their resourcefulness and good citizenship. In this way, rock becomes part of an everyday practice of good citizenship – over a very short period of time this trope comes to dominate the suggestion that rock is a threat to youth or society.

FOUNDATIONAL NARRATIVES, 1956

The jukebox musicals released in the closing months of 1956 are characterised by their very tentative assertion of a place for rock 'n' roll in the face of a sceptical or even downright hostile older generation.

The narratives in one way or another seek to bring the older generation around to some degree of approval

or acceptance of rock 'n' roll. These films often include the aforementioned aspects of "threat" and "citizenship" in equal measure, and in them rock 'n' roll eventually becomes the solution to the issue at the centre of the story. This is most clearly evidenced in the films *Rock, Pretty Baby!*, *Shake, Rattle and Rock!*, and *Don't Knock the Rock*.

Rock, Pretty Baby! (Bartlett, Universal International) is a variation on the story of the "rock 'n' roll artist rising to fame" as established by *Rock Around the Clock*. It concerns a high school rock 'n' roll band "The Jimmy Daley Combo" as they try to find gigs and worry about what they will do in the future if the band cannot pay its way. A concurrent story-line involves Jimmy Daley's relationship with his father, a liberal doctor who nonetheless expects his son to follow in his footsteps, and is thus opposed to Jimmy's ideas of a career in rock 'n' roll.

A key moment early in the film finds the band booked to play at a college party. The situation presented is a refreshing inversion of what are usually marked as 1950s parental fears about rock 'n' roll leading to undesirable acts such as sex and violence. Here rock 'n' roll dancing is a pleasurable end in itself: the girls have *too much* fun dancing. The frat boys come out quite explicitly *against* rock 'n' roll because it prevents "romance" - the girls would rather dance to rock 'n' roll than engage in activities such as "necking". The band sings "Can I Steal a Little Love" which provides an arch commentary on a situation where rock 'n' roll is quite literally stealing a little love away from the frat boys. Jimmy refuses frat boy Bruce's demands not to play rock n roll on grounds of authenticity; he would lose face in front of the youth audience ("these kids would mark us as lousy") which results in the band being sent packing. This loyalty to rock is a trope that is subsequently engendered in many rock music films.

Conflict abounds in the performance of rock 'n' roll in the film, and *Rock, Pretty Baby!* works through this complex terrain in a novel way. At the frat party mentioned above, Jimmy befriends Joan who is studying to be a musical arranger. The two team up in a professional way in order to further their musical vocations. Jimmy becomes so lovesick that it actually interferes with his music – he mopes around, stops turning up to practice, and is hostile towards Joan, such that she eventually pairs with Bruce, the frat boy, resulting in a jealousy-driven punch up between the boys. Jimmy's deferral of sexual desire due to his

commitment to rock 'n' roll produces the tension that leads to the very violence adults in the film are fearful of. Interestingly too, the point at which Dr Daley realises that Jimmy's problem is nothing more than that he's in love with Joan is the precise point at which he accepts and endorses his son's vocation in rock 'n' roll. The son's duty as a "good citizen" is to replicate the family, which, when achieved, can accommodate rock 'n' roll just as easily as it could medicine as a vocation. The film ends with the band gaining second prize in a talent competition and subsequently being offered a two-week residency at a summer holiday camp. Rock 'n' roll thus provides a means for gainful if seasonal employment, and by the end of the film Dr Daley has become the group's number one fan and supporter.

Where the generational problem in *Rock, Pretty Baby* resolves in the relationship between a son and a caring father, *Shake, Rattle and Rock!* (Cahn, Sunset Productions) articulates this as outright antagonism between rock 'n' roll and a comic group of ageing busybodies. Through the course of the film disc jockey Gary Fenwick establishes a chain of rock 'n' roll clubs with the explicit purpose of bringing potential delinquents off the streets in order to enjoy music and to engage in creative and socially responsible pursuits. Fenwick is taken to trial by a self-appointed group of moralists who call themselves the "Society for the Prevention of Rock 'n' roll Corruption of American Youth" (SPRACAY). SPRACAY argues that engagement in rock 'n' roll is a kind of "de-civilising" process that produces a decadent (white) youth whose listening practices lead to a life of lust and crime. In a televised trial, which presages *Idol* and *Big Brother* by almost fifty years, "viewers" phone in to vote for one side or the other, the winner being the side declared with the most votes.

Fenwick's defence of rock 'n' roll rests on several arguments: the first is the liberal argument that youth left to themselves will be good, responsible citizens. Secondly, Fenwick develops an argument - à la *Rock Around the Clock* - that rock 'n' roll is a cultural expression that has emerged authentically from youth themselves: "rock and roll is an art form, a cultural expression evolved by and for the youth of today". Fenwick finally wins his case by demonstrating there is little difficulty in making a rockin' version of a Chopin piece. Thus, audaciously, rock 'n' roll takes its place not merely in relation to popular musical forms (boogie, jive and swing as *Rock Around the Clock* would have it), but in relation to the entire

history of Western art music. Fenwick's "democratic courtroom victory" concludes with both sides celebrating: Fats Domino performs 'I'm in Love Again' and both young and old (including the members of SPRACAY) join together on the rock 'n' roll dance floor.

Katzman's sequel to *Rock Around the Clock*, *Don't Knock the Rock* (Sears, Clover Productions), released only a few weeks after *Shake, Rattle and Rock*, has an even more didactic narrative. Successful rock 'n' roller Arnie Haynes (performed by former jazz vocalist Alan Dale) returns to his small hometown Melondale for a break from touring. Haynes is approached by a group of locals concerned about rock 'n' roll bringing depravity to their town. Conservative journalist Arlene MacLaine arrives in town with her daughter Francine (who subsequently becomes romantically involved with Haynes) in order to report on the issue. The conflict culminates in a pageant for the townsfolk, featuring performances by "The Young Players of Melondale" and hosted, for no good reason, by Alan Freed.² The pageant makes almost precisely the same case as that in *Don't Knock the Rock*; allowing an analogy to be drawn between the current good citizens of Melondale who once danced to the Charleston and the good young citizens drawn to rock and roll. This produces an immediate apology from the "older generation" and, as with *Don't Knock the Rock*, the generations are unified by rock 'n' roll's affect: dancing this time to Arnie appositely performing the song 'Don't Knock the Rock'.

The function of Haynes' romantic relationship with Francine is to bring him into close contact with a character who is positioned as an articulate spokesperson for the teenage position: "Teenagers are almost adults. They're entitled to their own opinions, not what somebody dictates for them," and later "You know, I've come to the conclusion that rock and roll is a symptom of the young people...They resent the wrong kind of discipline by parents". Haynes comes to the realisation that he is entirely expendable as a rock 'n' roll singer: young people are fans of his simply as a symbol of defiance towards parents.

Furthermore it is Francine's argument which shames the parents into their support of rock 'n' roll at the

² For a detailed account on Alan Freed's excessive presence in jukebox musicals, see James 2016 pp. 45-54

end of the film: “Parents don't want to blame themselves when kids act up so they find something like rock and roll to blame.”

The *foundational* jukebox narratives then assert the space of rock ‘n’ roll from a position of relative fragility and weakness. Rock ‘n’ roll is positioned as a kind of precarious mid-ground between adult disapproval on the one hand and the forces of delinquency on the other. It is rock ‘n’ roll's very precariousness which brings about the particular kind of imaginary narrative resolution we can see evident in each of the four films discussed above: the “older” generation are brought to an approval of rock ‘n’ roll in part by the music's sheer affect, but also through a series of arguments asserting the rights of teens to their own space.

INTERMEDIATE NARRATIVES: DIVERSIFICATION OF COMMON THEMES 1957-58

Where there is considerable homogeneity between the *foundational* jukebox musicals release in late 1956, the period of 1957 to 1958 is marked by a diversification of narrative themes, signalling a shift in the ways rock ‘n’ roll was presented to audiences. During this time, the *foundational* narratives are maintained by some films (e.g. *Rock Baby - Rock It!* (Sporup, Freebar, 1957); *Hot Rod Gang* (Landers, Indio, 1958)), and are modified in others. We propose two main discourses to describe this deviance from mainstream stories of “youth space under threat”; these include the incorporation of contiguous narratives, and music industry narratives. It is at this point in the late 1950s that Elvis’ movies begin production and release, adding to the heightened variety of ways that rock ‘n’ roll was incorporated diegetically into youth-oriented films.

CONTIGUOUS NARRATIVES

Films in this category represent instability in the role rock ‘n’ roll was playing in jukebox musicals of the late 1950s. They can be characterised by being less concerned with finding narrative pretexts for stringing together a range of performances, and more with exploring a contiguous relationship between the narrative and rock ‘n’ roll: telling a story which inserts occasional music performance. Instigating this trend was the very late 1956 release of *Rock, Rock Rock* (Price, Vanguard), featuring a range of televised

rock 'n' roll performances which are "nested" in the narrative, watched by the main female character, Dori, in her lounge room. Although rock 'n' roll forms the background and perhaps horizon of Dori's cultural aspirations, the main narrative of the film is concerned with a complicated series of economic exchanges involved in the purchase of a dress for the prom. In these exchanges Dori's father attempts to teach his daughter the value of money. Dori however is involved in an economy where she has no power and no income, but conjures money through a complex series of, in some cases quite dubious, transactions in order to fulfil her desire.

Four films with a considerably smaller roster of artists than appear in *Rock, Rock, Rock* continued this narrative trend in 1957. *Rock All Night* (Corman, Sunset) and *Carnival Rock* (Corman, Roger Corman Productions) set their rather dark narratives in spaces that are quite literally contiguous with rock and roll performance – the former in a bar, and the latter in a club. Both films are essentially in two parts, the first part establishing the space with the inclusion of rock 'n' roll performances, and the second where the development of the dramatic situation takes over from and precludes the representation of rock 'n' roll performance. Both these films intimate the connection between rock 'n' roll and the tacky nature of the venues, but it is here at the level of proxemics that the connection ends. Rather than rock 'n' roll being represented as a particular form of delinquent activity, rock 'n' roll is associated with delinquent activities merely by virtue of occupying a contiguous space. Another example is the Mamie van Doren vehicle *Untamed Youth* (Koch, Devonshire Productions), set on a prison farm where young people are convicted by a corrupt judge so as to provide extremely cheap labour. The young men and women work hard on the cotton fields all day and party all night to rock 'n' roll music until acts of civil disobedience combined with an admission of guilt from the judge alters their situation. Rock 'n' roll has no function other than to keep up the spirits of the inmates. In close alignment with *foundational* narrative tendencies, *Rockabilly Baby* (Claxton, Regal Films) is a film that bears basically no relationship to its title: no rockabilly music is actually used in the feature. Eleanor, who has two teenage children and a secret (many years ago she had performed as a burlesque dancer) begins a new life in a small town. The townsfolk find out about her secret and, after a brief moment where it looks like she may be forced to leave, accept the positive

changes she has brought to the town. The message of tolerant liberalism of the film sits easily with the bulk of the jukebox musicals. One of Eleanor's principle acts is to push for an unsupervised dance space for the town's youth which she equates explicitly with good citizenship: "they haven't been given the chance to be given the responsibility necessary to make them solid citizens." Despite some resistance from the 'Women's Civics Committee' she succeeds in establishing the club with the support of the town Matriarch, which succeeds in its aim of demonstrating that the teenagers are fully capable of making appropriate ethical choices. Through these films, one can see a changing response to rock and roll as a genre that is maintaining, if not increasing, its dominance over music charts and the youth market.

INDUSTRY NARRATIVES

The second theme we will cover in terms of *intermediary* narratives is the transition from "backstage musical" to stories directly concerning the business and marketing of rock 'n' roll. Unlike the earlier rock 'n' roll films, which are tentatively attempting to establish a space for rock 'n' roll under conditions of threat of extinction, by 1958 these films represent a moment where teen-oriented music, rock 'n' roll in particular, is seen quite voraciously to dominate the market. Two films, *Let's Rock* (Foster, Columbia) and *The Big Beat* (Cowan, United International Pictures), both released in June of 1958 are significant because their narratives are entirely predicated upon rock 'n' roll's complete market victory. *Let's Rock* is self-consciously the *Hamlet* of jukebox musicals: a meditation on an exchange of dialogue between Tommy Adane, a formerly successful balladeer whose career has lately been going nowhere, and Charlie, his manager:

Tommy: "To Rock or not to Rock?"

Charlie: "That is the question!"

Tommy's record label is pushing him in the direction of rock 'n' roll partly because he's not selling records and partly because rock 'n' roll records don't require a full orchestra and are therefore much cheaper to make than the ballads Tommy's career has been built on. Tommy spends the entire film moping about trying to decide whether to quit balladeering and become a rock 'n' roller. He worries about

his authenticity as a rock 'n' roll performer in terms of his fears that teen audiences will see straight through him if his performance is not genuine. The film solves this problem by having him fall in love with a female song writer who is writing rock 'n' roll songs: he thus becomes successful again because he can authentically perform her songs with the appropriate emotion.

In *The Big Beat*, rock 'n' roll also dominates the market. The entire film is concerned with the problems a conservative record label has in dealing with rock 'n' roll's newfound influence. Johnny Randall has been newly appointed vice-president of his father Joseph's company, Randell Records. He learns that the record buying public are primarily 14-25 year olds, mostly girls. Johnny seeks to tailor his product to this new market but doesn't have much idea about how to do so. There is very little rock 'n' roll in this film, just like its characters the film doesn't really seem to know what rock 'n' roll is or where it fits in.

Johnny finally succeeds in the new business environment not by discovering a new artist or a successful new sound, but by a novel marketing approach, teaming up with a supermarket chain for distribution and sales of product. Industry narratives represent a new direction where production companies work to "keep up" with the progression of rock 'n' roll in the industry proper; in these films rock 'n' roll was no longer a threat to the moral and social, and it was simply that which determined the market.

Calypso Tangents

As a briefly popular genre in United States in the mid-late 1950s, so-called calypso music³ was also taken up by exploitation film makers, utilising industry narratives. Ironically, as Thomas Doherty (2002: 79-81) has pointed out, by the time the films exploiting the Calypso craze were released in mid-1957 their potential audience had already moved on. *Calypso Heat Wave* (Sears, Clover) in particular represents an important new development in the representation of rock 'n' roll's assertion of space: the independent record company as the primary site for the argument between authenticity and exploitation. The narrative's central opposition is between Disco Records owner, Mack Adams - a champion of artist's stylistic control - and a gangster, Barney Pearl, who is more interested in the profitability of records.

³ Calypso music originates in the music of Trinidad and Tobago, and the Caribbean more generally.

Barney muscles in on Disco Records bringing considerable financial success to the company at the expense of its nurturing relationship to its artists, facilitating a walk-out by Johnny Conroy, the label's most commercially successful star. Conroy chooses an authentic, "laid back" Calypso lifestyle over a set of "inauthentic" business relations. Mack manages to shake off Barney and bring Johnny back from the Caribbean with a number of legitimate Calypso artists in tow. It matters little whether *Calypso Heat Wave* advocates Calypso music over rock 'n' roll. As in earlier films like *Don't Knock the Rock*, the music industry is in the business of bringing the authentic music of the teenager to him or herself. *Calypso Heat Wave* develops this argument by claiming that authenticity provides the mechanism by which exploitation may be foiled; the teenage audience can be assured that the authentic artist will not stand for the exploitative business relationship promoted by figures like Barney Pearl; and authentic artists can be reassured that the teenage audience is capable of discriminating between authentic and exploitative musics. The influx of calypso films represents the degree to which producers of exploitation films aligned their topics with the music charts to stay, as they thought, at the crest of the wave. This is a significant factor in the creation of the *intermediate* phase to which we refer, such that narratives are deviating from the established norm of the *foundational* narrative in order to predict where rock 'n' roll will land in the youth market.

SECURE NARRATIVES

This new perception of market domination created an interesting problem for filmmakers who sought to make films representing rock 'n' roll in 1959. No longer could the narratives be driven by a representation of the space of rock 'n' roll as tentative, under threat or in need of defence. Rock 'n' roll was now secure in its place in driving the youth music market. Three new possibilities for jukebox musical storylines were explored in 1959; the first was that rock 'n' roll, along with other popular musical forms, represented a significant element of the vitality and democratic spirit of American culture (e.g. *Juke Box Rhythm* (Dreifuss, Clover)). The second was a post-modern celebration of popular music, incorporating parody and pastiche, and a mixing of genres (e.g. *The Ghost of Dragstrip Hollow* (Hole, Alta Vista)). The third

direction of film narratives saw rock 'n' roll join forces with "muscular Christianity" for the benefit of delinquent children (e.g. *Hey Boy! Hey Girl!* (Rich, Columbia) and *Girls Town* (Haas, Zugsmith)). In *Jukebox Rhythm*, rock 'n' roll becomes a major element celebrating the open society, sitting comfortably with a variety of other musical genres, such as jazz and Dixieland, which combined together represent the democratic melting pot of US culture. The film concerns the affairs of Princess Ann, from an unnamed European principality, who has come to New York with her Aunt Margaret as chaperon, in order to purchase a set of coronation outfits. The princess is attracted by the open society and correspondingly falls for a pop singer, although Royal protocol dictates that little is allowed to develop by way of romance. The following brief conversation between Margaret and Princess Ann is exemplary in terms of the tone of films made in the "secure" phase:

Aunt Margaret (complaining about America): ... and that immoral music ...

Princess Ann: Popular music is *not* immoral!

The arguments against rock 'n' roll explored in earlier films like *Shake! Rattle and Rock!* are here displaced – no longer does the argument concerning rock 'n' roll's inherent immorality have particular force in the domestic US context, so if the argument is to be made at all, it is in the context of a debate between an old, inward looking, aristocratic Europe as opposed to a younger more outward looking and democratic leaning Europe.

A second possibility for jukebox narratives in 1959 was what could somewhat anachronistically be described as "post-modern" celebration. *The Ghost of Dragstrip Hollow* is, like *The Girl Can't Help It* (Twentieth Century Fox, 1956), a highly self-conscious comedy, extremely rare for jukebox musicals. It is a film which unashamedly mixes genres. The storyline is very simple – the standard trope of the threatened space of the car club which doubles as a rock 'n' roll canteen (the kids are behind on rent). Rather than raising the cash so as to keep the space, the kids simply move into a haunted house which, once exorcised by this rock 'n' roll/horror party, becomes a kind of "free space": no rent is due and they can have the space in perpetuity. The film at once looks back to the earlier films where the teen space is threatened and the major concerns are economic: finding ways to pay for the space. It also looks forward

to the American Independent Pictures beach movies of the 1960s where the hedonistic teen space never concerns itself with financial issues.

While earlier films such as *Sing Boy Sing!* (Ephron, Twentieth Century Fox, 1958) and *Go Johnny Go!* (Landers, Hal Roach, 1959) emblematised the somewhat agonistic relationship rock 'n' roll had with Protestant Christianity in the 1950s, by 1959 rock 'n' roll has an entirely positive and supportive relationship with muscular Christianity, specifically Catholicism. *Hey Boy, Hey Girl!* brings Louis Prima and his band's blending of jazz and rock 'n' roll into a close relationship with the everyday citizenship values of the Catholic Church via a romantic relationship with Dorothy Spencer (Prima's then wife Keely Smith), when raising funds for a Catholic Youth Camp in order to prevent potential delinquency. In *Girls Town* (Haas, Zugsmith) Jimmy Parlow (Paul Anka) entertains female juvenile delinquents at "Girls Town"; not a reform school but a Catholic place of rehabilitation for girls.

Though superficially the church seems at odds with rock 'n' roll, it is logical that films like *Girls Town* or *Hey Boy! Hey Girl!* can so seamlessly create an alignment between rock 'n' roll and enforced Catholic values in the face of female delinquency. The films strategically exploit the Christian/Catholic conception of citizenship - a value that was embedded in everyday American life - to emphasise a link between young people, rock 'n' roll and community-mindedness that had already been established in the *foundational* narratives of 1956. Though these narratives have been maintained throughout 1957-59, the secure phase represents the demise of such storylines, as they are no longer effective in reflecting pop market trends, nor in gaining attention from youth or adults.

CONCLUSION

This article demonstrates the finer developments in rock 'n' roll exploitation films and proposes a new typology for understanding micro-developments in youth and popular cultures between 1956-59. In particular, we have detailed the dialectical relationship between rock, social attitudes to rock, and the principles of good citizenship. This analysis is by no means exhaustive - as we have noted, Elvis' movies and other "social hygiene" features were also active at this time and helped to shape the state of play for cinema to engage with youth music trends.

Though the threat to rock as a youth music had been arrested in the *secure* phase, the trope of “rock as threat” has subsequently been reactivated at various times throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. The idea of rock ‘n’ roll as a threat to youth and social order is an important discourse for the organisation of much rock history, rock criticism, and has influenced the cultural production and mythologising of rock’s canonic narratives. As we plot the course of rock history through the 1960s, the continued development of “rock as threat” sets its sights on socio-political contexts, with youth movements becoming a threat to existing authority through the countercultural invocation of “good citizenship” (emphasis on civil rights, opposing the Vietnam war, exploration new forms of liberty and freedom, and so on). We note that it is a very short distance from the telethon and radio-thon fundraiser (represented as forms of good citizenship in 1950s jukebox musicals, for example *Jamboree!* (Lockwood, Vanguard Productions, 1975)) to rock spectacle in aid of good international causes evidenced in such events as George Harrison’s *Concert for Bangladesh* (Swimmer, Apple Corps/ Twentieth Century Fox, 1972) and the *Live Aid* fundraising effort for Ethiopian Famine (Scarza, American Broadcasting Company, 1985).

With the field of popular music in film growing, there remain further lines of inquiry to be investigated. Certainly, the employment of popular music in cinema has continued to develop over the past 60 years, branching into other film styles such as biopics, documentaries and movie-length video clips. Jukebox musicals paved the way for a new breed of popular music films that became more heavily embedded in youth subcultures to be taken up in the early 1960s in the USA and across the Pacific. Examples include, surfing and beach party films e.g. *Gidget* (Columbia Pictures, 1959), *Beach Party* (American International Pictures, 1963); artist based films e.g. *A Hard Day’s Night* (United Artists, 1964); and filmic remakes of stage musicals, e.g. *Bye Bye Birdie* (Columbia Pictures, 1963).

This article contributes to discussion of the relationship between popular music and youth film trends by demonstrating the reflexivity of film production in the late 1950s. Not only were exploitation films and jukebox musicals developed to proactively maintain a youth market, producers followed popular music charts keenly as a guide to top trends: this is most clearly observed by the calypso “blip” of 1957. The

tensions and anxieties concerning the place of rock 'n' roll manifest in the jukebox musicals provides a fertile resource for theorizing the relationship between youth and popular music more generally.

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