

Chapter 22

Mainstream Rock of the Eighties and Nineties

In a very short time, rock music matured and expanded into a large diversity of styles, some of which had their heyday and then died out while others have undergone a continuous evolution since they began. Many important, newer styles developed and greatly broadened the meaning of the term “rock music.” By the 80's, much rock music drew from a combination of 70's styles. The term *mainstream* can be used to identify that music because it developed out of the main stream of the rock music that preceded it.

Many musicians deserve to be discussed with this style, but only a few can be.

Mainstream Artists

Soul and funk were important elements for Prince (Rogers Nelson), born 1959 in Minneapolis. Prince wrote and produced his own first album when he was only 18. His father was a jazz musician and his mother was a singer. Instruments were available to him any time, although he never had any private lessons as a child. He did learn to play the piano, guitar, and drums. Prince wrote his own music and played his own instrumental parts on almost all tracks on his first five albums.

Prince's style basically combined funk with rock, but it also showed the influences of new wave, disco, and rap. His earlier music was basically filled with sexual innuendo until his album in 1980 was too explicit to get any airtime.

Play Prince---Let's Go Crazy (1:1)

For later projects, Prince added a backup band he called the Revolution. The project included an album, film and concert tour and was called *Purple Rain*. This project established Prince as a star. Five top 40 hit singles were released from the album and it won three Grammys and an Oscar for Best Original Song Score. In 1985, Prince established his own record label, Paisley Park, and produced movie soundtracks and other albums with much success. His later soundtracks included music for *Under the Cherry Moon* and *Batman*.

Prince was married in 1996. His 1996 album, *Emancipation*, represented his freedom from his contract with Warner Bros. and the start of his own label NPG Records. The album was also about the anticipated birth of his first child.

Roles played by female singers/musicians changed during the 70's and 80's with many becoming very well known and creating a "tough" image. Of the successful women, Madonna gained the most commercial success and appeal.

Madonna's debut album was released in 1983 and she's had many successful albums and singles since that release. She had a long involvement with dance and that influenced much of her music. In addition to her dancing, Madonna was involved in acting, playing a number of film roles. In 1996 she played the role of Eva Peron in the film version of *Evita*.

Play Madonna---Papa Don't Preach as recorded by Kelly Osbourne (1:2)

Play Madonna---Can't Stop (1:3)

She continues to be active though her productions have slowed a bit since the birth of her child in the late 1990's.

The influence of Punk and New Wave was spreading to new bands that used punk's pounding beat but did not otherwise display characteristics of the style. One such band was R.E.M., from Athens, GA, and they redefined southern rock for the 80's. The band achieved a blended sound so that no single part stood out from any other.

Play R.E.M.---Radio Free Europe (1:4)---FROM THEIR FIRST ALBUM, *MURMUR*, IN 1983

Later, Michael Stipe's vocals began to stand out from the rest of the band. One reason is that the songs contained lyrics they wanted people to understand. R.E.M.'s album, *Out of Time* (1991), included the single, *Losing My Religion*. That album, single, and its video all won 1992 Grammy awards.

Play R.E.M.---Losing My Religion (1:5)

From Dublin, U2 emerged as a symbol for peace and optimism for the 80's. The group did not stress solo styles, but worked to create a blended sound to which vocals were added. Members of U2 grew up listening to New York punk groups but they took their own sound from the RandB style of their countryman, Van Morrison the commitment of Bruce Springsteen, and the careful use of electronics to fill out but not overcomplicate their basic lines.

Listen to U2---Out of Control (1:6)

Three of the four members of U2 were openly religious but they did not use their fame as a platform to profess their own beliefs. But, their religious practices did influence their music. For example, *Gloria*, from their 1981 album is based on a Gregorian Chant.

Listen to U2---Gloria (1:7)

In later years, U2 made political appeals to their native country of Ireland. One album, *War* (1983) included several songs aimed at the problem of war in their country. *Surrender*, from that album was an antiwar statement that also expressed concern about the deaths of individuals including suicides.

During concerts, Bono often waved a large white flag as a symbol of surrender and end to war. The all white flag had no nationalistic markings, making it a symbol of internationalism.

Listen to U2---Surrender (1:8)

In the middle 90's, Hootie and the Blowfish emerged with an image entirely different from the angry or depressed alternative bands. This was a group of entirely normal, ordinary guys who liked sports and good music. The name came from the owl-eyed and big-cheeked looks of two of the members of the band. Their debut album, *Cracked Rear View* (1994) became the fastest selling debut album in the history of Atlantic Records and remained on the top 200 list a full two years later.

Listen to Hootie and the Blowfish---Only Wanna Be With You (1:9) From *Cracked Rear View*