

# “Got to Start Someplace Baby:”<sup>1</sup> Youth, Rock and Roll, and Peace

by Sharon Froese Nielsen and Peggy MacDonald

During the long years of emerging adulthood, a variety of influences affect the development of one's attitudes. The content of what one learns during this process of socialization is very much affected by one's culture and the time during which one grows up.

Youth in contemporary societies, despite the differences of their various cultures, share the knowledge of the potential — and sometimes apparently inevitable — destructive nature of nuclear weaponry. While many of us have been born since World War II and the discovery of atomic energy, many of us grew up in more naive times. Escaping the effects of a nuclear detonation by hiding under desks at school, curling up in the fetal position on the street, moving into bomb shelters, was once thought to be possible. Today, young people no longer have the luxury of such naiveté. As Sharon's 15 year-old niece calmly said, “We're going to die of a disease or a nuclear bomb.”

The lifelong process by which one learns to become a functioning member of society — socialization — is primarily accomplished by four agents, according to sociologists.<sup>2</sup> Parents, the first agent of socialization, are important, having the first input and accomplishing this in a relationship based on both love and inequality. School also has an influence on people's attitudes, behaviour and the like. One's peers, too, are crucial to the process of self-discovery.

Finally, the media influence the content of one's socialization. Of the various media, tele-

vision is possibly the most powerful. However it could surely be argued that music, especially rock and roll, is influential in affecting socialization. Moreover, the marriage of rock music and television, in videos and MuchMusic, is undeniably an important aspect of the media to youth.

There is much in rock music that influences attitudes. Listeners are able to empathize with or fantasize about young love, young love gone wrong, and a myriad of “love”-related situations. The lyrics may focus on intimate relationships, formal relationships (with teachers, for instance, or other authority figures), friendships, young people, old people, getting married, not getting married, the work place; in other words, on just about anything or interest.

Rock music functions in a variety of ways — as music to dance to; a means of expressing one's personal or social “type” (for instance, preppies like one style of music, rebels another, and so on); a means of communication with one's peers; a means of education; a way of excluding adults (especially parents); and an ac-

cepted way of rebelling. Rock music is the basis of an entire set of sub-cultures.

There is much in rock music and rock videos that can be regarded as having a negative influence. There is, for instance, violence in some lyrics and on some videos. There is also a great deal of sexism, both blatant and subtle. As well, some artists have trivialized important social issues — Madonna's “Papa Don't Preach” is an excellent example of the trivialization of the problem of teen pregnancy.

However, there is a great deal that is positive to be found in contemporary rock music. There is a fairly recent re-emergence of music with politically conscious lyrics. Some rock music contains lyrics that show an awareness and analysis of social problems, as well as a promotion of social activism. Moreover, such music has found its way into mainstream rock where it has the potential to reach massive numbers of people. Billy Bragg, for instance, has been popular on the fringes with his politically left-wing analyses of issues, but he is now being aired on main-

stream radio and even on MuchMusic on television. Some of the most popular musicians, in fact, address social issues in a serious and concerned fashion.

Paul Simon is one of many musicians who have discussed and analyzed apartheid in their music. Racism has been addressed by a variety of artists including Bob Marley, Parachute Club, Four the Moment,<sup>3</sup> and many others. Aretha Franklin and Annie Lennox (of the Eurythmics),



Billy Bryans and Lorraine Segato of Parachute Club Photo: Laurence Acland

with "The Sisters Are Doin' It for Themselves," and Parachute Club (with their rousing "Rise Up") are two of many groups in the mainstream of pop music who have examined sexism. The problems, as well as the joys inherent in being working class have been analyzed by Bruce Springsteen in almost all of his exceedingly popular albums. Springsteen has also discussed such issues as the problems of early marriage due to pregnancy, the sadness of life lived in the past, the joys of driving, working, and so on. The Payolas with Carole Pope do an incredible job of describing contemporary relationships in the song "Never Said I Loved You." The Matt Minglewood band's hit song, "Me and the Boys" recalls the frustration and wonder of growing up, as does Bob Seger's "Night Moves." John Cougar Mellancamp has addressed issues such as poverty in a rich society ("Down and Out in Paradise"), racism in terms of North American indigenous peoples ("Hotdogs and Hamburgers"), and even middle-aged angst ("The Real Life")! Robbie Robertson's "Showdown at Big Sky" on his new album also focuses on racism. Suzanne Vega broke new ground with her popular hit "My Name is Luka," a description of child abuse from the child's perspective.

A great deal of current rock music focuses on the issues of war and peace. There is a broad spectrum of anti-war, pro-peace analyses which may focus on specific confrontations such as those in central America, or on making general anti-war statements, anti-nuclear and anti-nuclear weapons statements. The analyses range from the simplistic, such as Boy George's "War is Stupid," to the elegant and sophisticated, especially U2's *Joshua Tree* album.

Central America is the focus of a great deal of politically aware music. Bruce Cockburn, following his trip to Central America, recorded much on this issue. In fact, his angry song, "If I Had a Rocket Launcher," certainly demonstrates the ability of rock lyrics to startle people into examining social issues. The Clash, too, have focussed on Central America with their album *Sandinista*.

There have been a variety of artists making anti-war statements. Gino Vanelli's "Time Out" from the *Big Dreams Never Sleep* album is one such example. And Luba, on her *Secrets and*

*Sins* album, discusses the "Storm Before the Calm." Dire Straits' album *Brothers in Arms* is very much anti-war. (Incidentally, this band tended to focus on adult markets but when this album was released, with little fanfare as to the peace and protest content, young people as well as adults bought and loved it). The title song talks about war and soldiering:

*These mist covered mountains  
Are a home now for me  
But my home is the lowlands  
And always will be  
Someday you'll return to  
Your valleys and your farms  
And you'll no longer burn  
To be brothers in arms.<sup>4</sup>*

The song concludes with Dire Straits saying that, "We're fools to make war/On our brothers in arms."<sup>5</sup>

U2's extremely popular album *Joshua Tree* generally has an anti-war message, a message that has been heard on previous albums as well. In "Sunday Bloody Sunday" (which they deliberately premiered in Northern Ireland), U2 says:

*And the battle's just begun,  
There's many lost, but tell me who  
has won?  
The trenches dug within our hearts,  
And mother's children, brothers,  
sisters torn apart.<sup>6</sup>*

Anti-nuclear messages are also found in much rock music. Nina's "99 Red Balloons," which was extremely popular, discusses the possibility of nuclear war because of a silly accident (mistaking balloons for missiles). Timbuk 3 made an anti-nuclear statement in their hit "My Future's So Bright I've Got to Wear Shades." John Fogerty has taken an anti-war position in his music and his piece, "Eye of the Zombie," makes an anti-nuclear statement. As well, Luba's "Storm Before the Calm" can be interpreted as a discussion of nuclear war. Finally, there is the No Nukes album recorded by a variety of artists — Musicians United for Safe Energy (MUSE) — in a series of benefit concerts in 1979. The focus of the group of musicians is a non-nuclear future. Such popular artists as The Doobie Brothers, Jackson Browne, Crosby, Stills and Nash, James Taylor, Bruce Springsteen, Tom Petty and many others contributed.

It is interesting that many 'mature' artists are making such anti-nuclear statements. While U2 can be seen as avant garde and focussing on youth, other artists who are more established over the long-term are again socially active. Perhaps this re-awakening of groups who have for years done traditional rock music has to do with their becoming parents and, as a result, wanting to do something, reacting as other parents do. For whatever reasons, political content in rock music is socially acceptable now.

While there is much rock music that makes anti-nuclear or anti-war statements, there is much, too, that makes pro-peace statements. Years ago, of course, John Lennon recorded "Imagine." Currently, many popular artists are actively pro-peace. Sting, for instance, recorded the song "Russians" on the *Dream of the Blue Turtles* album. It points out that both Russians and Americans have children and love them, so we should look after our planet and not engage in war. A similar sentiment is expressed in "Ordinary People" by the Box. Parachute Club has a broad vision of peace, linking it to the eradication of homophobia, racism and sexism.

Finally, rock music has been used by the artists themselves for positive social change. There have been a variety of concerts and albums with specific themes to benefit particular groups of people. This is one very positive aspect of rock music — focussing it to do good in a large arena. A series of concerts and recordings focussed on Ethiopian famine relief; Bob Geldof was instrumental in instigating the efforts. *Band Aid*, a group of predominantly European artists, released "Do They Know It's Christmas" in 1984. This was followed rapidly by groups of American artists — *USA for Africa's* "We Are the World" — and Canadian artists — *Northern Lights'* "Tears Are Not Enough." A "Live Aid" concert was subsequently held simultaneously in London, England and Philadelphia.

Other social issues have been addressed and aided in this way. A *Very Special Christmas* album was released this year to aid the Special Olympics. AIDS research was assisted with the release of "That's What Friends Are For." The "Conspiracy of Hope" tour was a benefit for Amnesty International and featured such big name artists as Bryan

Adams, U2, Joan Baez, and Sting among others. *Artists United Against Apartheid* released a benefit album.

There is, clearly, much social awareness in rock music today. It is now socially acceptable to be "political" in one's music and many artists are promoting peace whether this is personal peace, communal, regional, or global. Rock music also features anti-war commentary, concern over confrontations in Central America and South Africa, anti-nuclear (weapons) sentiments. And it is using its very special appeal to do some social good.

It is plausible to believe that this surfeit of social awareness, concern, analysis, and action will affect those who listen. Rock music is an integral aspect of young people's lives and has the potential to affect the content of their socialization. In this way, then contemporary rock music has the potential to influence young people in making them aware of social issues, helping them analyze them, and showing them ways to act. If we wish youth to learn about war and peace, we've "got to start someplace." Rock music seems to be a good place.

<sup>1</sup>Bob Dylan, "Something's Burning, Baby," *Empire Burlesque*, 1985.

<sup>2</sup>Robert Hagedorn, ed., *Sociology* (Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1983). Second ed.

<sup>3</sup>*Four the Moment* is a Halifax-based acapella group of four black women whose music focuses on racism and, most recently, on the experience of black women in Nova Scotia. They have just recorded an album which is available in women's bookstores (as of February 1988) or from 2650 Fuller Terrace, Halifax, B3K 3V7.

<sup>4</sup>Dire Straits, "Brothers in Arms," *Brothers in Arms*, 1985.

<sup>5</sup>Dire Straits, "Brothers in Arms."

<sup>6</sup>U2, "Sunday Bloody Sunday," *War*, 1983.

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# Women Working for Peace: Reclaiming the Imagination

by Rosemary Sullivan

I am a woman working for peace. I first identified myself in this way five years ago. Before that I had been a teacher, a mother, a psychosynthesist, an adult educator working in women's studies and a pastoral animator (spiritual counsellor) at the college level in the Québec CEGEP system, offering workshops in self awareness/self expression, organizing women's networks, lobbying for more services and opportunities for women in the social services, in education, in the Church. In 1982, after seeing the NFB film with Dr. Helen Caldicott *If You Love This Planet*, I undertook a personal spiritual pilgrimage. At age 42, I walked from my home in Pigeon Hill, Québec, one hour south of Montréal, to the United Nations in New York City for the June 12 Disarmament Rally. I wanted to be with the hundreds of thousands of others gathering there from all over the world. I needed to walk the 400 miles alone, 22 days, one step after another, touching the earth.

This journey was my own crisis of imagination. I felt that so much was so horribly wrong in the world. I doubted all the effort I had made in the past. I needed a new vision for my own future, as well as for the future of the planet.

My vision of peace, personal wholeness and social change is facilitated when people are able to share themselves with others in cooperative inter-connecting structures based on Earth's own organic regenerative life process; when individuals are allowed to value and trust their inner knowing; when people support each other to discover new visions and create new models for learning and growth. Our present society is made up of structures based on competition, hierarchy and control through "power over." The goal-directed search for global security and personal growth separates us from each other when it is contained by linear struc-

tures that locate knowledge and power outside of ourselves, where objective knowledge is king and the number of missiles, the fortress to protect us from "the enemy." The focus of my work is to value imagination and intuition in an organic, self-directed process of developing mind, voice, and self, the whole person.<sup>1</sup> With each step I now take I continue that pilgrimage in creating alternative structures which support myself and others to learn and live for peace.

Educating for peace: how do I do this? I design every workshop or class — regardless of content or issues — so that I begin by offering participants the opportunity to get in touch with themselves, their needs, what they want to learn, what they already 'know,' subjective knowing that comes from life experience, what images they are carrying inside of themselves. I begin with imagery. Images give us the opportunity to speak in concrete ways about our inner knowing, our subjective life experience, that experience which has been pushed to the underside, which has been undervalued and hidden in our educational, healthcare, "national defense" systems.

Sometimes I start with images cut out of magazines piled in the centre of the circle of participants. We then use our hands and eyes to find an image, a color, a shape, a symbol that speaks about 'peacemaking' to us, speaks for us. This is how Lanie Melamed<sup>2</sup> and I began our workshop at the Fate of the Earth Conference in 1986, "From the Underside: Women's Process of Peacemaking." We went around and behind the words. There was no demand to put our knowing into concepts that would immediately make sense to others. We started by letting ourselves discover the knowing that comes from our subjective experience. We used the images to introduce ourselves, to say why we were there in that particular workshop on