

The Resurrection of the Devil In contemporary pop music

by r.a. kawalilak

'I beheld Satan as lightning falling from heaven. He wished to be thought an exalted power, which is above God the Creator, and to be thought to be the Christ, and to be called the Standing One.'

LUKE

The twentieth century will be written into the history books as a period of great social upheavals, tragic destructions in war, and legalized genocide. It will be known as a time of the primitive spirits and unawaking life.

We are witnessing this in the contemporary pop music field.

'I am the lord of hell-fire and I bring you fire.'

So declares Arthur Brown in the current top 40 chart-toppers "Fire". Brown, whose act is billed as the Crazy World of Arthur Brown, happens to be the ultimate symbol for the devil. This prince of darkness bursts from a mammoth egg onto a stage, bathed in fire-light. He preaches a gospel of 'go through fire to be cleansed, go through evil to be made innocent. Turn away from safe white, drown in mad black'. Brown, who happens to be

a Phil, graduate from Reeding University, is not an isolated example at all, even though his act which includes setting himself on fire is by far the most dramatic.

Along with "Fire", Brown's symphony to the devil, several other powers of darkness songs have made the top of the charts. Hugh Masekela's "Grazing in the Grass", a devilish, black-sounding blues number topped the Billboard North America charts this summer. "Ring of Fire", a Bob Dylan composition and performed by 'Jools', is the recent British sensation. Currently, a prayer to the devil for intercession in love, "IN-A-GADDA-DA-VIDA" by the Iron Butterfly, is receiving extensive air-play locally.

The Moody Blues' latest album, 'In Search of the Lost Chord', shows the ghost of Christ rising in fire from an open grave. The 'Grateful Dead' are playing an 'Anthem of the Sun', the Rolling Stones play their 'Satanic Majesties Request', and Al Wilson sings of 'The Snake'.

In the novel 'My Detention' by Christopher Logan, pop music breeds a dark power. "There is a

belief in a force, altogether distinct from physical power, which acts in all kinds of ways good and evil, which it is of great advantage to possess or control . . . It is a power or influence, not physical, and in a way supernatural, but it shows itself in physical force, or in any kind of power or excellence which a man possesses. This devil is not fixed in anything, and can be conveyed in almost anything . . ."

Even that lost dream of the future, the Canadian Pop scene, has come under the influence of this philosophy. The Collectors, a Vancouver based group, in a mind-bending collage of dark-tinted sounds, beat you with the 'What Love' (Suite);

love is not beauty or passion
love is violence
black is masculine violence
. . . what love?
. . . does anyone hear?

Is our music a mirror of our own violence and insensitivity? Has the philosophy of love really died and been replaced by the philosophy of blackness? If it has, what else is there?—after the resurrection of the Devil.

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Films

Dialogue between the Monolith (from *2001: A Space Odyssey*) and Barbarella (from *Barbarella*):

The scene is Ultimate Space—rather a vague area, all misty and radiant. Slowly the outlines of our characters emerge. The monolith is shiny, mathematical, intimidating, inscrutable. Barbarella is Jane Fonda, intriguingly semi-nude beyond the wildest dreams of the pre-18s who are flocking to the first non-Restricted skin-flick in the history of this fair province.

The Monolith: I must say I find inhabiting the same fictional universe as you do extremely distasteful. My Maker, Mr. Kubrick, went to such pains to construct in me the ultimate symbol!

Barbarella: I sorta preferred Max von Sydow as Jesus in *The Greatest Story Ever Told*. You're not very sexy.

The Monolith: Did anyone throw himself at the screen screaming "It's God, it's God!" for Max?

Barbarella: No, but you shudda seen the cast party! But enough of this banter. Let's get to the point: what d'you have against me?

The Monolith: You're vulgar! Utterly and completely! Kubrick spent millions of dollars achieving verisimilitude in his masterpiece; in your vehicle the wires show, the special effects are all out of old Hercules movies. . . .

Barbarella: O.K., so I'm not swamped in hardware. So millions of dollars that might have filled the mouths of the hungry wasn't spent on me. So what? Haven't you ever heard of "willing suspension of disbelief"?

The Monolith: Not when it comes to things like your Angel—not an ignoble figure in the original cartoon strip—sounding like a ninth-rate gigolo! Not when it's a matter of your considerable charms being prostituted to a musical score that would have sounded shocking in a Hollywood B-movie of the early fifties.

Barbarella: You've got a point. But is vulgarity the worst sin? How would you react to an accusation of crass obscurantism?

The Monolith: (Loftily.) Accuse away!

Barbarella: You asked for it. How come a big intellectual director like Mr. Kubrick can make a film that goes on and on, it sure isn't too fast for folks to grasp, and when it's all over nobody knows what happens?? (Unless they read Mr. Clarke's book, which Mr. Kubrick travesties anyway.)

The Monolith: Because the ending is ambiguous and pregnant with meaning.

Barbarella: Look, I may look like a hick little girl from the midwest, but I went to the Sorbonne and I know all about ambiguity. But how ambiguous can you get? I mean, there's them as thinks the film's really upbeat, a hymn of praise to man's indomitable spirit. Fine. But there's others as swear it's the most blankly pessimistic film ever!

The Monolith: Pessimistic? With all that hardware?

Barbarella: Yes, with all that hardware, with the only human being in the film a faggoty computer called HAL (one down from IBM), with Keir Dullea coming across as the most dehumanized thing since the Chicago police, with the film ending with his finding his own death in an airless 18th-century room.

The Monolith: But, assuming that nihilism, what better can you offer? The slick, crass betrayal of what might have been a charming idea.

Barbarella: Weren't you even a bit amused?

The Monolith (melting; rather a gooey sight): Well, I must admit I enjoyed the first half hour, and there were intermittent good things thereafter.

Barbarella: Aw, you're sweet. And I thought *2001* was intriguing—icy, infuriating, but intriguing. And come to think of it, you're even vaguely phallic. . . .

With which we draw a discreet curtain over the rest of the scene.

—John Thompson