

Bennett, Andy, Griffith University, Australia

Between the Old Grey Whistle Test and Top of the Pops: British Pop-Rock in the Early 1970s

Wedged between the politically charged counter-culture of the late 1960s and the punk backlash of the late 1970s, early 1970s British popular music been largely ignored by academic writers who have tended to characterise the era as one of bland and largely effete music. However, as series of retrospective documentaries and magazine features are now beginning to illustrate, British popular music in the early 1970s was highly diverse with many artists displaying an eclecticism that became increasingly difficult to sustain beyond the early 1980s when video technology and MTV imposed new standards of branding on artists and their music. Such eclecticism was clearly displayed in a genre loosely defined as pop-rock, a descriptor that can be applied to a number of bands positioned in a grey zone between AOR (Album Orientated Rock) and the singles charts. Pop-rock artists such as Mott The Hoople, Roxy Music, the early Queen, the Sensational Alex Harvey Band (SAHB) and Stealers Wheel successfully straddled the album and singles markets producing music that often drew on a variety of different musical traditions. Similarly, 'studio' based pop-rock artists of the 1970s such as Manchester band 10cc set new benchmarks for songwriting and production, utilising the full-potential of the studio to produce albums of highly diverse material and in some cases featuring special studio-crafted effects and soundscapes that remain unique to this day. This paper considers the significance of British pop-rock as a medium for musical creativity and exploration and a means through which a broad audience could access and connect with music of a more experimental nature.