

Collins, Madonna, deserve tickets on death plane

Only the good die young, and in these days of computer-programmed repetitious radio programs, the greats are sorely missed. Brian Jones, Sam Cooke, Otis Redding, Ronnie Van Zandt, Jimi Hendrix, Ricky Nelson, Elvis, Janis Joplin, Sid Vicious, Jim Morrison, Marvin Gaye, Bob Marley, John Lennon, John Bonham, Keith Moon, Mama Cass and Buddy Holly all lived hard and fast in the rock 'n' roll tradition and left fresh corpses. Drugs claimed a lot of them, drink took others, a ham sandwich took Mama Cass, Lennon was murdered, but since rock is a frequent-flyer profession airplanes claimed quite a few. The airplane is probably the third leading cause of death among rock superstars, after cocaine and fast cars.

These tragedies have taken the greatest stars from the scene leaving rock fans with only memories and scratchy albums. The Righteous Brothers sang, "If there's a rock and roll heaven the must have a mighty fine band." That assumes that old St. Peter slides the Pearly Gates aside for rock hedonists and occultists despite stringent regulations and that the competition's band is made up of third-rate lounge singers (like the Righteous Brothers). The real problem is that the rockers that only manage to be obnoxious and waste valuable vinyl and radio time never seem to leave. I still see that jerk, Tiny Tim (Tiny Talent), who once had a smash record with "Tiptoe Through the Tulips" show up on a

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talk show occasionally. Why couldn't he just tiptoe under a rock and die?

Then there's all those no talent wonderkids showing up five times an hour on my radio or on my Mpty-V (That Hendrix died a decade before MTV, shows how little justice there is in the world). The Madonnas, the Boy Georges (leave it to the Boy to take conservative heroin doses), the Bryan Adamases, the Miami Sound Machines and the Phil Collinses keep on and on and on. They cloud up the radio — just think how many new bands could use the airspace now filled by Phil's 23 simultaneous singles. Phil is a rock 'n' roll pig, a glutton. It's not enough to have a successful band. He's got to have a solo career and produce every no account singer to come down the pike. If only the true greats had been that prolific. It's not that I wish death upon these people. I just marvel at the irony of their unbearably long and ubiquitous success, when the greats seem to have had such a short time to spend on our rock 'n' roll planet.

Hell, Mouserise went gold; these new pretenders and poseurs don't impress me in the least. It's sheer demographics. Radio programmers only got to put these people on heavy rotation to get one percent of the

nation's teens or prepubescents to buy that garbage, then I got to hear it for the rest of my life. But everyone still loves the King, warts and all.

No, I don't wanna kill these people. But when I'm rolling down the highway listening to the radio because my cassette player's busted and I have to be subjected to Wham three times before I reach my destination, then I imagine the possibilities. I imagine The Late Great Rock and Roll Airplane of Death.

It's a benefit thing, sorta like Farm-Aid but it's a success. It's a nationwide tour, so again they come nowhere near the South. They travel in a Concorde SST, so seating is limited. It's a Mach I trip to rock 'n' roll hell. Everybody is on this tour; the We Are the World folks, the Band-Aiders, the cream of Heavy Metal (if there is any) and they're all picked by their fans in an MTV phone-in vote. From a phone-booth in New York with a wheelbarrow full of dimes, I stack the deck.

Knowing the ratio between death and airplanes I fill the Concorde with those that are truly deserving to make this trip. Madonna is booked way in advance; it's disgusting to see the role model she presents to young wanna-bes. She made her entire career titillating young boys on MTV and grown men with the real thing (the grown-ups remain unimpressed). Put Madonna up front. Maybe we can seat her next to Micheal Jackson. It's been so long since he released his last record (nervous, Mike?) that fans

wouldn't be deprived of anything anyway.

Phil Collins should be on that plane, especially after his pretentious bi-continental appearances at Live-Aid. If he misses this Concorde he should at least be brought up on Sherman anti-trust violations. Lionel Ritchie may want to go to this party, fiesta, forever, all night long, with all the rest of the "We Are the World" singers, except Ray Charles. Unfortunately, Kenny Rogers isn't even in the category. Wasn't it ironic that Kenny postponed his SAC appearance last year? What'd he do, lose his voice? Ever notice the Band-Aid singers went to the session in their street clothes, but Micheal J. and the rest of We Are the Saviours showed up in, like their Sergeant Pepper regalia. The English had to reattach us to rock again after Elvis went in the Army, maybe it's time again.

Speaking of the English, how come the Stones aren't dead yet? Now there's a group with staying power — they'll never leave. The very fact that Mick and Keith have made it into their '40s lends credence to the rumour of their pact with the devil. They deserve to go first class.

Speaking of seating assignments, let's assign the whole loud, crude and sloppy heavy metal tribe to tourist class. Except Twisted Sister, who should be assigned to the front to assure maximum impact. The Visogoths of the rock world have been around too long — it's time to clear the air. All these bands have been

releasing the same album for the past 20 years anyway, who needs any more of that tripe. We'll see how much they like the devil when they meet him on his own turf.

Now that space is becoming short we can economize on space by putting Seger, Mellencamp, Petty, Bryan Adams, John Eddie, and John Cafferty and the Beaver Brown Band in the same seat. Bruce, of course, won't sharing the seat. Springsteen will be flying in a higher plane.

Put all the punkers in baggage. Tina Turner would make the hottest stewardess the world has ever seen. Make Pat Benatar one, too. Elton John should be the Captain Fantastic. Give Duran Duran faulty parachutes and a warning about the plane's imminent demise.

The only regret is that Billy Joel could not just be made to disappear, but relegated to a Holiday Inn lounge where he belongs.

Dylan sounds dead lately; maybe he should get a special rate.

Anybody still playing anything resembling disco ought to be invited.

I don't wish death on these people, maybe something much more subtle. A one-way trip into the Bermuda Triangle. Set them down on Gilligan's Island. Maybe a Back to the Future type of affect. Tuck them safely away somewhere where we won't have to here them again. Build the mystique. Maybe terrorists could take them to Lebanon or something. The main thing is, get them off my radio.

From 'Hag' to 'Bocephus' — That's country

For some less hardy of soul and imagination it is nothing more than a wailing, back woods mating call for "Skoal dippin" rednecks who drive pick-ups with Confederate flags draped across the rear windshield.

For some it is the very essence of life itself, filled with life's most colorful characters; the Hag (Merle Haggard), the Red-Headed Stranger (Willie Nelson) and Bocephus (Hank Williams Jr.).

That's right folks, it's country music.

While Top 40 music stations come and go like bad odors in a poorly ventilated room, country stations continue to be the most popular around.

Life's greatest successes and failures pressed in vinyl, sung by folks who have lived them.

It's a form of music that most people can identify with, the common man at his high and low points. Everyone has had these feelings at one time or another, no matter if he's a brain surgeon or a cess pool cleaner.

Country music is a truly American form of expression. It's born out of a way of life that is lived by "down-home types" who come alive on the Troll's jukebox every Friday and Saturday night.

And what an effect it has.

Chapel Hillians who wouldn't admit to even liking country music can be seen belting out the impromptu chorus to Hank Williams Jr.'s "Family Tradition." So tell me Hank, why do you drink . . . , why do you roll smoke . . . , why you live out the songs that you wrote . . . Sing it Susie and Freddy! Do your parents you know snuck out the back door of Spanky's when they weren't looking?

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The variety is there, too. There's a song for every emotion. From the heavy, down-trodden tones of George "The Possum" Jones' "If Drinking Don't Kill Me, Her Memory Will" to the lively "Cajun Moon" by Ricky Skaggs.

While groups such as Alabama appeal to the lighter side of country, the hard-core fans stick to the old rebel corps comprised of entertainers your mother warned you you'd grow up to look like if you nursed a whiskey bottle for the better part of your life.

George Jones, Merle Haggard, Willie Nelson, Hank Jr., Johnny Cash, Waylon Jennings, Kris Kristofferson and David Allan Coe are all members of this elite group.

With their worn leather, sunken, hollow eyes, and scraggly beards, they could probably scare more people than the thought of Motley Crue teaching your youngsters how to use an electric carving knife.

These men have also logged more prison hours than your average ax-wielding mass murderer.

Coe, who is the owner of a face even his mother probably didn't love, did 20 years of hard time after being convicted of first degree murder when he was 18 years old. Rumor has it he also was a founding member of the Charlotte (N.C.) Outlaws motorcycle gang. Let's face it, the guy gets around.

Haggard, a San Quentin resident

at the time, was turned on to the idea of being an entertainer by Cash, who was playing a benefit at his old California hang-out. Cash said he felt it was his duty to take his message back to the place "he learned about life" during his incarceration for drug abuse. Cash describes his addiction to drugs as an outgrowth of certain factors in his life.

"Hell, I'd do drugs for any number of reasons," he told late-night TV guru David Letterman. "There's always some reason to do them. Maybe because your leg hurts or your wife left you, or maybe because your leg doesn't hurt or your wife won't leave you."

A rationale so simple anyone can understand it. Songs so understandable, even the simplest people can comprehend them.

Country musicians also tend to point out problems that are confined to the "good ole US of A." No world politics emerge in between verses that tell of drunken debauchery in the darkest part of town. Farm Aid was a showcase for these performers. They got together and emphasized the problems here at home that others would rather pass over on the way to dealing with larger global issues. Even rock 'n' rollers John Cougar Mellencamp and Tom Petty joined in the celebration after cutting "down home" albums like "Scarecrow" and "Southern Accents."

Country music brings to mind the constants that the sands of time can't cover up — the green, green grass of home, rampant alcoholism, and that hide-away honky-tonk. Lifestyles of the Good, the Bad and the Ugly all rolled into one.

The jewels of the industry are the lyrics. They are truly in a class by

themselves.

Where else could you find literature like this:

• Well, nobody seems to care that I ain't guilty,

Lord, I never did the things they said I'd done,

But I guess they're gonna have to hang somebody,

And it's lookin' like I'm gonna be the one

(Randy Travis — "Send My Body")

• I grew up a dreamin' of being a cowboy,

And lovin' the cowboy ways

Pursuing the lives of my high-riding heroes,

I burned up my childhood days

(Willie Nelson — "My Heroes Have Always Been Cowboys")

• But now my wheels are rollin' southward,

And heaven comin' into view.

Home sweet home is Alabama,
And that's what I look forward to.
(Alabama—"If it Ain't Dixie, it Won't Do")

Country music isn't just a form of entertainment, it's a way of life. While adolescent teeny-boppers are running around at age 15 asking themselves what happened to Duran Duran, the "good ole boys" are still churning out albums for the millions of fans, outspoken rednecks or "closet types," who can't wait.

Scott Greig is a senior journalism major from Charlotte who, following a certain controversial editorial column, has been called everything from a liberal to an idiot. He's sure about one thing; he's no liberal.

Have an opinion; write a letter!

The Tar Heel always welcomes letters, provided they are typed double-spaced and include the author's name, major and year in school. Somebody out there must have an opinion on something — take advantage of the editorial freedom afforded by your student newspaper. When you're sporting bifocals and a visibly receding hairline, you'll have a tattered newspaper clipping to remind you of your college career.