

# Say it ain't so: a guide for music elitism

*Too many critics spoil the harmony music should provide. Editor finds music fans take their opinions much too seriously, turning what is supposed to be an enjoyable pastime into a battle of wit, wisdom, and musical knowledge.*

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I am a music geek, which is to say that I know plenty of useless information about bands that were once important. Usually, I do not use this knowledge to dazzle record store clerks or friends with my seemingly vast knowledge of music because that would be an incredible waste of my time. However, every once in a great while, I find it worth my time to engage in a friendly banter with music elitists who lurk in the dark corners of record stores. I look upon these situations as exercises of a wit that is otherwise of no use.

Unfortunately, lately it has become increasingly difficult to go head to head with people who do not understand there are other ambitions in life to strive towards other than the much coveted

title of "most pretentious music geek in town." Luckily, my skills at faking it have never been better. I have mentioned this art several times in my previous columns, but never in depth. With these new techniques, one's impressive music knowledge can move beyond the realm of mere razzle-dazzle; indeed, it might even scale the lofty heights of true razzamatazz.

The very essence of the musical elitist is the combination of smugness and inscrutability. While these two elements may seem unimportant, they are, in fact, critical in attempting to talk about a subject upon which one has no actual knowledge. Anyone who dares challenge the expert's views will be totally disarmed by the powerful combination these traits bring; he will feel a vague sense of shame for questioning someone so sure of himself, and will almost certainly panic upon realizing that he cannot get any kind of handle on the elitist's personal taste. An important rule of musical inscrutability is to flout the conventional notions of what is good and bad. Pretending to hate good music is easy enough; however, pretending to like bad music, which may occasionally be necessary, is a little

trickier. If one fails, he will wind up looking like a philistine with terrible taste, or even worse, an ironist. One cannot merely prance around telling everyone The Beatles are terrible and Kelly Clarkson is great; he must dress it up a little. Talk about vapid music in meaninglessly erudite terms: "Def Leppard brilliantly conveyed the foundation of existential despair which necessarily lurks beneath a life of hedonism." Whoever has just mistakenly engaged in a conversation where sentences as such are thrown around will be completely confused and hopefully a little shocked, therefore allowing the expert to make his getaway.

Occasionally, one must vehemently disagree with conventional wisdom and critical consensus. There is a persuasive counterargument to everything, and if he can think on his feet, it is possible to refute even the most iron-clad rock notions.

Most people who try to fake musical expertise do so only by not admitting they like anything. While that is a good start, it is also an eventual dead-end. It is equally important to one's inscrutability to be cagy about what he does not like. He must be quick to defend even the

most worthless pop music and do so completely without irony. The ultimate goal is not simply to have something good to say about anything bad and something bad to say about anything good. One must strive to make his taste and opinions completely baffling, unpredictable and impenetrable. Being ridiculous and contrary all the time might just make one appear insane, so one should not overdo it. Instead, he should engage in normal, civil conversations about music and then spring a bizarre opinion on his adversary.

A favorite game among music elitists is the "over-rated or underrated" game, and to give the impression that one has everything figured out, he must remember that only he is the true arbiter of how to rate any given band correctly, since he is immune to the hype, nostalgia, and politics that comprise the critical reputation of a musical act. Within him is the single flawless barometer that reveals the true quality of every band in the universe. Claiming a band is underrated is a good way to advance it for consideration in the critical canon. As a benevolent dictator, it is wise and just to allow a fair number of underdogs and ob-

scure indie bands into one's hallowed halls of underrating. However, it is always a good idea to throw in some odd artists so that one's opponent does not really know what is going on. Kevin Federline? Underrated. Fall Out Boy? Definitely underrated. In contrast, anything liked by anyone but the critic himself is overrated. If one has a clean shot at a record store clerk liking Nirvana, he should not hesitate to point out Nirvana is disgustingly overrated. The clerk knows they are. He will not be able to argue; he has already lost the battle. However, if someone mentions liking an underground favorite like Television or The Velvet Underground, one would be treading on thin ice to declare their critical acclaim is unwarranted. Instead, he can use the most devious trick in the "Faking It" handbook: "They're definitely good, yeah, but a little overrated."

Faking music knowledge is extremely amusing and one of my favorite means of wasting my time. Yet, it should be realized that going out of one's way to be a music snob at all times is no good; nobody likes the "most pretentious music geek in town." People should have fun and listen to whatever their hearts desire.

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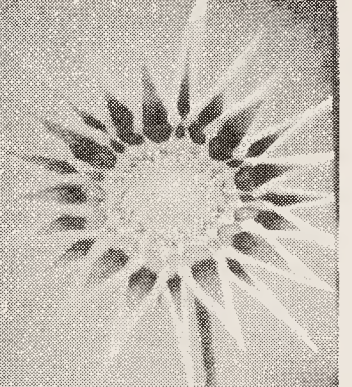
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