

# Neo-disco-Hindi and Other Permutations



Frank Boile

by Dean Havron

**I**T'S BEEN quite a while since I've listened to much rock and roll, and even longer since I've had a mind to read any critical reviews of the latest happenings in that seemingly burned-out field. My disaffection began with the Beatles's demise. Then

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came the cannibalistic defloration of the Aquarian counterculture. Finally, there was the end of college and my resigned entry into the 40-hour-a-week world of chattering office machines, polyester suits, and wrestling with expense account vouchers.

Thus it was with a fresh interest that I focused recently on a rock and roll review in *The New York Times*, brought to my attention by a friend, Oxford philosopher W. T. Snodgrass. We were intrigued in particular by one passage. Discussing one group's background, the *Times's* erudite

scribe noted that the band had recently progressed from the "rockabilly" stage to the "proto-heavy metal" plateau.

My first reaction, other than delight at the seriousness with which the topic was treated, was that apparently a lot *has* been happening in rock music since I turned off my radio. *Proto-heavy metal*? For such a classification to exist and to be tossed off so matter-of-factly in a general-circulation-newspaper article implied that the music—or its school of criticism—had attained a degree of refinement I had not been aware of.

A good start, I thought, that fleeting reference. But why stop there? It seemed to me possible to devise a rational, coherent system for classifying the various genres of the art form. Humbly, I have undertaken to develop such a framework.

I realized from the outset that for a system to be effective, it would have to: (1) be flexible enough to accommodate current distinctions as well as to anticipate future ones; (2) provide a consistent format for sequential construction; and (3) be easy to use.

It seemed like a task for no less than H. W. Fowler. Undaunted, I began perusing recent *Melody Maker* headlines and flipping through the record collection of my adolescent years, while keeping an eye on *Charlie's Angels*, which was on television at the time. By the end of the program, the schema on page 43 had taken shape.

The most basic adjectives modifying the term "rock (and roll)" are listed in column C. In this column and the others, I have tried not only to give existing classes but also to anticipate future ones as well. Thus we have "folk-rock," for instance, or in a more current vein, "punk-rock."

The words in group B are first-degree adverbial modifiers of column C adjectives. Combined with the adjectives, they may in many cases stand alone, without the superfluous terminal reference, "rock." Thus, in informal colloquies among rock critics, or in the more recondite journals of their trade, one could simply refer to, say, "punkabilly" without fear of being misunderstood (note, for example, that this particular genre would harbor adolescent country pickers with a flair for masochism

ROCK		
A	B	C
neo-	rock(a)-	pop
proto-	punk(a)-	-billy
quasi-	pluton(a)-	metal
ortho-	(i.e., heavy metal)	folk-
trans-	heavy	acoustic
hyper-	British	punk
hypo-	Rast(a)-	proton
pseudo-	electro-	jazz-
pre-	galacto-	Hindi
post-	dec(a)-	space
intro-	kilo-	reggae
extro-	meg(a)-	Dada
pyro-	underground	acid
geo-	disco-	tribal
pluto-	porno-	gospel
plebeo-	(apo)calypso-	Motown
urban	futuro-	blues-
sub(ex)urban	orchestro-	flipper
synchro-	Latino-	chicle
soft-core	Anglo-	(i.e., bubble gum)
hard-core	Appalachia-	lava
straight-ahead	Delta (Mississippi)	pub-
Neanderthal	shrimp boat	necrophilia
Precambrian	stentorian	onomatopoeia
larval	Ukrainian	

and audience abuse).

At this point, the system seemed complete, but still I felt something was lacking. A further level of refinement was needed in order to assess the *quality* of a group's approach to its music. I therefore provided a list of second-degree adverbs in column A. Let's say a punkabilly group shows some promise of becoming one of the fine (ortho-) bands of its class. But due to a lack of application, perhaps resulting from chronic glue-sniffing or other neo-pubertal trauma, its performance falls somewhat short of the ideal. The group would then fall victim, deservedly, to the label "*hypo-punkabilly*."

Similarly, suppose a group of dissatisfied Detroit soul rockers adopted elements of southern mountain music, then launched a cause célèbre fund-raising tour of the wealthy white liberal cocktail party circuit. Ergo, the "pluto-Appalachia-Motown" school would be born. Or, how would one describe a band of East Indian sitar pickers who, fed up with ragas, turn off, tune out, and cash in on the current commercial

rage? Simple: "neo-disco-Hindi."

As can be seen, the permutations are as dazzling as they are virtually endless (given the system's continued development). True, there are difficulties. Which is correct, for instance: "galacto-reggae" or "Rasta-space"? I can't resolve this problem. I would only hope that in time popular usage and precedent would come to dictate the preferred form.

Also, even among today's groups there may be a particularly innovative band or two that may fall between the cracks of the schema. Yet I believe that this system has the flexibility, and above all the universality, to meet and ultimately conquer such exceptions.

Lately now, my faith in the rock and roll evolutionary process has been refreshed, and I believe once again in the music's potential for ultimate perfectibility. Enough so that one day, while paging through the annals of rock criticism, I will not be unduly surprised to read of the world's first proponents of the school of "proto-apocalypso-billy" rock. ●

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MONEY BACK GUARANTEE

# A Two-Handkerchief Smash

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by Walter Terry

**"T**WENTIETH CENTURY-FOX is still in a state of shock," said Nora Kaye, executive producer of *The Turning Point*, the amazingly successful movie about life in the ballet. "Fox seemed to think that after the last balletomane had seen the movie, no one would buy another ticket. But when we opened in New York, we had long lines at the box office and had to run in two theaters. We were an instant hit in Philadelphia; we were a smash in Toronto and San Francisco; and when we took the film to Havana, Castro asked for a print to show to twenty-seven thousand young people attending a youth congress."

*The Turning Point* stars Anne Bancroft and Shirley MacLaine, introduces the dazzling dancer Mikhail Baryshnikov as an actor, and features American Ballet Theatre's principals, corps, and guest stars. It tells the story of two middle-aged women who together had studied ballet, joined a company as young hopefuls, and remained close friends. One had opted for a career and had become a great ballerina; the other had chosen marriage, a family, and small-town life. Now at their turning point as they near fifty years of age, they question themselves and each other, with doubts and anger and tears, wondering whether they made the right turn in their youth. The housewife (MacLaine) is haunted by the fact that she might have become a prima ballerina if she had stuck it out. The prima ballerina (Bancroft), increasingly being replaced by young dancers and pressured toward retirement, agonizes over the end of her career in mid-life and envies the wife and mother.

Kaye, one of the great ballerinas of our era—in the Forties and Fifties she rose from corps de ballet to stardom with the American Ballet Theatre—discussed the movie with me. "The theme of the film goes beyond dance," she said. "The problem of the two women is shared by every woman who must decide between giving her life to a career and giving it to a family. Some do both, but if the career is all-consuming, it won't work out.

"I gave up the dance for Herb [Herbert Ross, director of *The Turning Point* and a world-famous film and theater director], and I have never regretted it. I must admit that when I stopped dancing, I was at the height of my career. I could even have gone on for a few more years, but I would have lost Herb." Kaye, married to Ross for 20 years, has been married before (once to Isaac Stern, the violinist), but each time, conflicting careers brought an end to the marriages. Still, she says, "there's really nothing of me in the picture."

But to friends and faithful balletomanes, the plot and several characterizations come as no surprise, for the term "dramatic ballerina" was coined to describe Nora Kaye. With the Ballet Theatre (as American Ballet Theatre was then called), she excelled in the new dramatic ballets—ballets that were not about princesses and fairies and flowers and magical birds—being choreographed by Antony Tudor, Agnes de Mille, and, subsequently, by her close friend Jerome Robbins. Kaye was a superb technician and danced her share of white swans and black swans, but she became a star overnight, in 1942, when she danced (and acted) the role of Hagar, the middle-aged, unloved heroine of Antony Tudor's *Pillar of Fire*. Her performance earned her 27 curtain calls at the Metropolitan Opera House. When she was instantly described as "the Duse of the dance," she replied, "Very flattering if people knew who the hell Duse was. Call me the Bernhardt of ballet!"

Kaye's intense interest in the drama of dance interwoven with the drama of life inspired the idea for *The Turning Point*. "It's a picture Herb and I have wanted to make for ten years," she said. "He calls me executive producer, but I'm really chief nagger." When she started nagging Ross a decade ago, they went to playwright and longtime friend Arthur Laurents, but at the time he felt he could do nothing with an idea for a ballet-oriented movie. "Over the years, we considered some scripts," said Kaye. "I remember four that were submitted. One script was very British; we would have used the Royal Ballet if we had accepted it. But we didn't. Just eight years after we had started slowly but surely

working on our plan, I suddenly said to Herb, 'It's got to be filmed now.' Herb looked over his shoulder at me—he was busy—and said, 'Okay, call Arthur.' So I called Arthur Laurents right then and there, and Arthur said, 'Okay.' Well, Herb had the idea for the story, Arthur wrote it, Herb directed it, Herb and Arthur produced it, Fox distributed it, and I nagged."

Oldsters would describe *The Turning Point* as "a two-handkerchief movie," and indeed, some dance critics have noted a soap opera element in it. "Of course it has the soaps in it," says Kaye. "We wanted the film to have universal appeal. I personally would have liked to have had more dancing in it. It killed us to cut some dance sequences, but I've never forgotten what I learned from Ed Sullivan years ago, when I was on his show. I was dancing 'Black Swan' and rehearsing the thirty-two fouettés. Well, you know I always did them pretty well. But Ed said that they were boring. I yelled, 'But this is the big moment in the pas de deux!' He repeated, 'Boring.' We cut 'em in half. For our movie, Herb has avoided repetition by using four cameras, various lenses, all kinds of angles. So the dancing becomes exciting, something new all the time. Combine it with a story, soap and all, and you've got what we've got: a movie hit."

Actually, *The Turning Point* is a point of pride, and Kaye, however much she wanted more ballet footage, would not have included it at the expense of the story for anything in the world. Aside from the drama involving the two leading ladies, the film is both a revelation and a celebration of the dancer's life. "Being in Hollywood so much with Herb, I had the chance to see actors and to compare their lives with the way dancers must work.

"I kept thinking of what the ballerina and the premier danseur must do in order to achieve a reputation; but for the movies, the actors, well, they just walk on. In this movie, I wanted to show the discipline and the dedication of the dancer. In a sense, you could describe *The Turning Point* as a documentary done as a spectacle."

The public, lining up at the box office, evidently agrees. Movie fans and balletomanes alike dab their eyes as the two heroines share longings and frustrations and final discoveries; they groan as the dancers sweat to achieve the perfection that prompted Martha Graham to describe the dancer as "the divine athlete"; and finally, inevitably, they gasp with wonder as Baryshnikov and his gleaming cohorts leap into their lives from filmdom's silver screen. ●