

FILM IN THE SEVENTIES

NEW WAVE AND 'OZPLOITATION'

By the end of the 1960s, many Australians felt that Australian stories on the big screen were lacking, as the Australian film industry had been swamped by Hollywood. Funding from the federal government to finance Australian films and establish schools to teach people about making them, together with the genuine interest of Australians to define their own culture, led to a surge in the production of Australian films. Over 400 **new wave** films were made between 1970 and 1985, some of which included *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975), *Don's Party* (1976), *Storm Boy* (1976), *The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith* (1978), *My Brilliant Career* (1979) and *Mad Max* (1979), which starred a young Mel Gibson.

Films such as *The Adventures of Barry McKenzie* (1972) and *Mad Max* have been labelled '**ozploitation**' as they exploited, celebrated and satirised stereotypical Australian culture, a phenomenon that has recurred over time in the Australian film industry. US films were still very popular in 1970s Australia with blockbusters such as *The Godfather* (1972), *Jaws* (1975), *Star Wars* (1977), *Superman* (1978) and *Rocky* (1976); science fiction stories in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977); and musicals such as *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975) and *Grease* (1978) all claiming their place in Australian popular culture.

'As a kid my parents and teachers insisted I see quality films like *Picnic at Hanging Rock*,' he explains. 'Then I saw this movie *Patrick*, about a telekinetic coma victim, on commercial TV late one night and it thrilled, excited and downright scared me, just like the horror films made in the US but with our voices, faces and places. I didn't know we could do that.'

SOURCE 4.4.8 Comment by Australian director Mark Hartley in 'Larrikin streak', by Tony Moore, *The Australian*, 16 August 2008

Q Explain the value of this source to a historian studying Australian popular culture.



SOURCE 4.4.9 Based on a novel of the same name, *Storm Boy* (1976) tells the story of a boy who rescues an orphaned baby pelican in the wetlands of South Australia.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Remembering and understanding

1 Define the terms below.

- bubblegum music
- new wave
- disco
- 'ozploitation'
- folk music
- punk
- glam rock
- sanitised
- hippie movement
- shock rockers

2 a Give two examples of how social attitudes and issues influenced the type of music that was being created and listened to in the 1960s.

b Why did the types of music available to young people in the 1970s begin to change from the previous decade?

3 a Why was there more Australian content in 1970s television and film?

b How was television in the 1970s contributing to a sense of an Australian identity?

c How was film in the 1970s contributing to a sense of an Australian identity?

Understanding and analysing

4 Construct a table to record how Britain and the United States influenced popular culture in Australia during the 1960s and 1970s.

5 Design and construct a diagram that summarises the types of music that young Australians listened to in the 1960s and 1970s, including examples of overseas and Australian performers.

Evaluating

6 Explain how improvements in television technology increased its influence as a vehicle of popular culture.

7 Why might hippie culture have been seen as a significant threat by those of older generations?

8 What are the possible positives and negatives of the emergence of 'ozploitation' films?

Evaluating and creating

9 Use the internet and other sources to find images of performers from the 1960s and 1970s such as those mentioned in this unit. Categorise them and create collages under the following headings: '1960s overseas', '1960s Australian', '1970s overseas' and '1970s Australian'. Once completed, consider if there are any significant differences or similarities between the collages and propose possible explanations for them.

THE X-FACTOR OF THE EIGHTIES AND NINETIES

With the passing of each successive decade, there are certain characteristics of popular culture that are particular to each period and define it in some way. In music, the 1950s was defined by rock 'n' roll, the 1960s was a time of the Beatles and the hippie movement, and the 1970s remembers disco, glam rock and punk. Although heavily influenced through mass media by the United States and Britain, Australians have tended to put their own spin on the dominant trends to give them an Australian flavour. However, as young people have gained access to improved communication technology they have also had access to a greater variety of choices in the types of music, associated styles in fashion, and values that come with both. So much so, that with each passing decade it becomes harder to define popular culture as being just one style or trend. In fact, neatly compartmentalising popular culture into decades does not quite do the job either, as people have come up with terms such as baby boomers, generation X, generation Y, and recently generation Z in an attempt to group people and their popular culture.

GENERATION X

Popular culture of the 1980s and 1990s was the world of **generation X**, generally defined as people born in the 1960s through to the late 1970s. Doing the maths indicates that early generation Xers were teenagers in the mid to late 1970s, so we can see why these sorts of definitions are imprecise. Just as it is fair to say that early baby boomer popular culture was different to that of late baby boomers, so is the case with generation X. Generation X youth are usually portrayed as being against the attitudes and values of their conservative baby boomer parents. Though mindful of the threat of nuclear war, they were distanced from the protests of the Vietnam War era and the political activism that broke down many of the social barriers for women and minority groups. Generation Xers are often described as socially and politically apathetic, cynical, and quietly rebellious against over-achieving parents. In France, they are literally referred to as Generation 'Whatever' based on the defining response of generation X teens to the criticism of their parents.

MUSIC IN THE EIGHTIES

MTV AND SYNTHESISERS

The influence of '**music television**' in the 1980s was significant. The MTV network, both the US and Australian versions, and the music video program *Rage* (1987–), brought local music and music from around the world to Australians. It also generated a new priority for many performers, that being the production of music videos, which often became more important than the quality of the music itself. Michael Jackson and Madonna became hugely influential stars during this period, as did British groups such as Duran Duran and Spandau Ballet with their big budget video clips viewed at home or in nightclubs. 'Boy bands' such as Bros, New Kids on the Block, and Wham! were specifically created to take advantage of this medium. Music videos strengthened the relationship between performers, advertisers, and of course the young audience. Stars performed in advertisements for all sorts of products, which often blurred the line between music and blatant **commercialism**. Another 1980s development was portable listening devices such as the Walkman, which gave young people the opportunity to listen to music without others hearing it. People from older generations considered this to be anti-social and often assumed that there must be something sinister about the music that they could not hear.

The distinctive sound of synthesisers became an addition to the music of many performers during the 1980s. Music from the 1980s experienced its own new wave as artists combined rock, punk and disco influences from the 1970s with synthesiser beats. British bands the Police, Simple Minds and Tears For Fears became popular, as did US performers Talking Heads, Prince and the Bangles. Australian bands also developed in this style of music, one of the most successful being INXS. Some groups such as Depeche Mode, Pet Shop Boys and Australia's Pseudo Echo were classed as '**synthpop**' for their heavy use of synthesisers, which saw their music being prominent in nightclubs. Others were closer to punk, such as the Cure and Billy Idol.

The first music video ever played on MTV, in 1981, was 'Video Killed the Radio Star' by Buggles.

DID YOU KNOW?