

Three dimensions of Taylor Swift Power

"Karma is my boyfriend"



Taylor Swift performs at Melbourne Cricket Ground on Feb. 16, 2024 in Melbourne, Australia. PHOTO: GRAHAM DENHOLM/TAS24/GETTY

Not since the Beatles has a musical act captured the imagination of whole cities in Australia like Taylor Swift. Moreover the performances are arguably at a level that even the most sophisticated operas or theatre would be proud of. Like the Beatles, Taylor Swift has changed the world in very wonderful ways but she has brought with this a kind of technical innovation and skill that will reverberate across the whole musical and theatrical industry. People will uncover layers and layers of performance skill and musicality for many years to come.

The Idea of Eras

Perhaps there are artists like Bob Dylan, the Rolling Stones that can talk of eras of their own sound or jazz artists like Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie, Miles Davis or John Coltrane where single works of art have to be considered within a whole corpus of sound like Cool Jazz or Bebop or Free Jazz.

No-one has ever had the smarts to articulate a corpus of work like Taylor Swift. It is not a mercenary undertaking. It is just about telling the truth of a life over a period of history in which fatigued and more worldly teenagers and grown ups come of age. 90s to 2000s to 2020s.

I am old enough to remember, as a 10 year old, my father filling up our EH Holden station wagon at the petrol station and coming back with a gold Beatles picture that seemed to me to have some kind of holy shine to it, such was their allure.

Who knows how their tour of 1968 changed our Australian economy? We now have the ability to quantify a little better the effect of the Eras tour on city economies. I think perhaps we could magnify by 100 the Beatles effect on Australia and we would come somewhere close to the transformational 2024 Taylor Swift effect on our local economy.

Taylor Swift is starting to define whole populations of people in the way Elvis defines the changing transition of the 1950s to the 1960s. Named after James Taylor, she attracts her parents 70s crowd and every generation of popular music rolling into the 2020s. The sheer breadth of her fan base is remarkable. The Taylor Swift eras are beautifully crafted productions that mirror the lives and ups and downs of most middle class Western individuals since 1989, the year of Taylor Swift's birth. She draws in everyone..

No-one has ever done this before.

The Wall/Waves/Changing Temperature of Taylor Swift's Sound: Cruel Summer

The technical know-how and skill of the Taylor Swift sound takes popular music to new Mozart like levels. It combines good writing and mastery of sound. There are some formulas in her songs that are as profound as the I IV V chord combination. The Swift sound though is not just repetition. It is wonderfully original.

Often artists of such originality take decades to understand. The harmonies of the Bee Gees or the special partnership of Lennon and Mc Cartney, Mc Cartney's unique bass playing for the Beatles, the guitar and drums of the Rolling Stones, Elton John's musicality and the eloquence of Bernie Taupin.

It is no accident that Cruel Summer is the most played of her songs. It is a wonderful, powerful crafted song. The temperature moves masterfully up and down with each chorus. Taylor Swift's famous bridges that she loves to emphasise so much in concerts simply elevate fans and our hearts and minds.

The change of temperature for the chorus of Cruel Summer is a masterpiece. The way this happens deserves serious analysis which is beyond my capability. The wave like effect is achieved by trebling and blowing out the vocal tracks and complementing them with harmonising synthesiser.

The structure of Cruel Summer itself is breathtaking worthy of any good poem or sonnet and the fact that is combined with a mastery of sound makes it irresistible.

It begins with an introductory mosaic that ends with a thumping one liner: "Devils roll the dice, Angels roll their eyes, What doesn't kill me makes me want you more.

Then up goes the temperature for:

"Its you" and the beautifully twisting vocals of "Cruel Summer". It is like bathing in an incredibly warm sound shower that is just exhilarating.

Just as the sound goes up and down, so too the emotions. The shout "He looks so pretty like a devil.. " then precedes the final uplifting, amended, extended chorus.

In all this weaves the story lines and wonderful writing", "I'm drunk in the back of the car and I cried like a baby coming home from the bar.. " "I slipped in through the garden gate every night that

summer.. “ all relatable experiences and metaphors of young love forbidden and luxurious.. never to be repeated.. impossible to resist temptations and soaring emotions.

“And if I bleed you will be the last to know”

Any artist would be proud of this serious production. It is why Taylor Swift can command hundreds of thousands of people in concerts, lifting them with soaring emotions, lifting them up on a cloud, a sound high.

Feminine Power/Value for Money/Generosity of Spirit

Taylor Swift is not a radical, political person. Yet she is daring and fearless and leads in unique ways.

The way she worships her fans is evident by the symbolic presentation of her celebrated 2020 hat in the middle of her shows. It is like a ritual offering. She and her team dance forward before she kneels and hugs a person who represents her fan base and her spirit. It is touching and to my knowledge is not matched in any performance of any overseas or even local artists. It embodies the spirit of her song “Karma”.

An old Melbourne commentator could not find fault with one of her sell out 96000 MCG performances except for the fact that it lasted so long.. a revealing statement about the individual concerned perhaps.. but there is rarely a performer, perhaps Bruce Springsteen who provides such value for money to audiences – 44 songs in a show with all sorts of surprises and revelations of future art and albums. Before Christmas I attended the brilliant fourth Ring Cycle performance in Brisbane by Opera Australia with an all Australian cast. For me the Eras tour is a modern equivalent, but more, it is a symbol of a new kind of woman's power and demand for higher quality and integrity in the music and entertainment industry.

In her well known confrontation with the Republic party and Donald Trump, Taylor Swift describes herself as embodying “Tennessee Christian Values”.... “and those are not Tennessee Christian Values”. There are no convoluted speeches here, just oppositional action. One cannot help contrast the practical way that Swift has asked people to simply register to vote with less effective rhetoric. She does not want to be cast in a political party but she stands for integrity and spirit and life. I think we are witnessing in her a new kind of feminine power and leadership.

‘Karma is her boyfriend’ above all else: a new kind of power and love embodied in not only her songs and music but in the way she conducts herself. What a breath of fresh air for the world.

I would not be surprised tonight if she even tames the wild thunderstorms headed to Sydney as I write these notes.

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