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The power ballad

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Abstract

The power ballad has become a mainstay of popular music since the 1970s. This article offers a history of the songs and discusses their place in the larger field of popular music genres. The songs are defined by the use of both a musical formula based on constant escalation and an expressive formula that combines the euphoric uplift created by rousing music with sentimental themes and ploys. Contrary to views that power ballads first appeared in 1980s rock and are primarily rock numbers, the songs emerged in the 1970s pop recordings of Barry Manilow and others, and from early on crossed genre lines, including pop, rock and R&B. These crossings result in an exchange between the fervour of the power ballad and the distinct expressive qualities of the other genres. This article also places the power ballad in the larger history of the ballad. The songs are part of a shift toward more effusive and demonstrative styles of ballads underway since the 1960s. In addition, the emotional excesses of the power ballad fit into a larger change in the expressive tone of works across different popular culture media. With those works, emotions are to be large, ecstatic and immediate.

Introduction

Power ballads are a prominent part of the soundtrack of popular culture. They are the songs that grow bigger, louder and more fervent on the way to impassioned finales. The emotional swells of the numbers have captivated listeners and made the songs appealing to a range of media, which tap into that expressive 'power'. A quick tour of different media shows how far the songs have spread across popular culture. Power ballads have crowded the charts for around four decades, taken up by such different artists as Barry Manilow, Journey, Guns N' Roses, Westlife, Céline Dion and Charice. Reality television talent shows like *X Factor* and *American Idol* treat the songs as grist, using them throughout the early rounds and then showcasing a particular one during the final episode. The closing show of the 2009 season of *X Factor*, for example, had the two contestants sing 'The Climb', which was released as a single by winner Joe McElderry. *American Idol* has a new song composed especially for the occasion, which unfailingly is a power ballad about dreams and victory. Some contestants on these programmes, like Leona Lewis on *X Factor*, make the songs their stock in trade. The numbers allow for striking displays of vocal athleticism, which astound viewers and have them imagine that they could possess such a voice. Films too have latched on to power ballads, often using them as rousing music for the closing credits, as with Dion's 'My Heart Will Go On' in *Titanic*. Many animated Disney musicals (*Beauty and the Beast* and *Mulan*, for example) typically follow a subdued performance of a ballad midway

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through the film with a power ballad version of the same song for the credits. Finally, the soundtrack for the video game *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* features the radio station Emotion 98.3, which spins power ballads, including Foreigner's 'Waiting for a Girl Like You' and Night Ranger's 'Sister Christian'.

As pervasive as power ballads have become, they have received little attention in the scholarly literature.[1] This neglect is another example of how popular music studies have kept a distance from the extremely popular and, yes, banal. There are notable exceptions like the studies of *Eurovision* and *American Idol*, but for the most part scholars tend to focus on new genres and more complex idioms or, when dealing with mainstream material, they turn to broader cultural dimensions, like those of race, gender and sexuality, rather than aspects of musical language, genre and expression (Raykoff and Tobin 2007; Meizel 2011). With the power ballad, expression demands critical attention, especially how the musical and genre properties of the songs create the scenes of escalating intensity that have made them both so successful and so hackneyed.

As the first study of the power ballad, this article addresses fundamental questions. First, what is a power ballad and, second, how is the touted 'power' achieved? The responses to these questions bring out the musical and expressive formulas utilised by the songs. Building on that groundwork, this article will turn to aspects of genre. In particular, how do power ballads operate within the larger field of popular music genres? Finally, in tracing the history of the power ballad, we should not forget that the songs fit into the larger history of the ballad and, as such, they reveal what amounts to the most significant shift in the ballad repertoire over the last 60 years. That shift is the move to more expressively demonstrative and emphatic kinds of ballads, of which there have been none more so than the power ballad.

What is a power ballad?

So far a few examples of power ballads have been given, if not specific songs, then artists closely associated with the numbers. In either case, the examples jump between genres. Some are by rock groups and others by pop and R&B artists. This mobility might cause some surprise, given that power ballads are commonly considered to be rock songs, especially those by 1980s rock and heavy metal bands. Those groups have indeed struck a claim to the power ballad, but from early on the term 'power ballad', as will be discussed, was applied to songs in genres other than rock. The first usages reveal a key feature of the power ballad: the songs cross genre lines.

Or it should be said that ballads cross those lines. Power ballads are ballads, fervent and effusive ballads, but still ballads. They function in the realm of popular music genres as ballads do.[2] Ballads, simply put, are a kind of song, one defined by both musical and expressive features.[3] The primary musical parameters are a slow tempo (perhaps the most characteristic feature of the numbers), lyrical melodic lines, rich harmonies to support those lines, melody and accompaniment textures to highlight them, and basic verse/chorus forms. The expressive characteristics include the topics of lyrics which, with ballads, trade in love and loss. Such tender emotions influence the rhetorical positions of the ballad, that is, the means of address and communication that it supports. Ballads court intimacy. A singer imparts what

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comes across as deeply felt emotions and draws in listeners through delicate candour.

The consolidation of these musical and expressive features defines the ballad as a kind of song. As such, the ballad is taken up in different genres, which draw upon its musical and expressive properties. The results are such numbers as rock ballads, R&B ballads and even hip hop ballads. These particular examples are interesting because they demonstrate the extent to which genres reach out to the ballad. The three genres have used the ballad to gain access to an expressive forum – slow tempo songs focused on romance – that was largely missing from the original forms of each one. With access gained, an exchange develops between the musical and expressive elements of the ballad and those of a host genre. In that trade, the host genre takes in the lyricism and vulnerable emotionality of the ballad and gives back to the ballad its own distinct qualities, like the raucous sounds of rock, the growling teases of R&B or the swagger of hip hop.

Power ballads hold to the defining characteristics of the ballad, although those properties can be altered through the emotional ramping up of the songs. Tempos, for example, remain slow in power ballads but can be given some kick, as happens with the heavy drumming in a rock number. Lyrical lines remain smooth; that is, until they leap up to a climactic high note. Love and loss are still prime emotions for power ballads; however, they, as will be discussed, can get lost in a charged cloud of feelings. The power ballad, like the ballad, is a kind of song taken up in different genres. The expressive energy of the numbers is one of the reasons that they have proliferated across genres. Musicians in various genres have sought to command that quality and to add it to the rich expressive resources of the genres in which they work. The result is an exchange similar to that which goes on between a ballad and different genres, with the exchange now centred on what can be made of that propulsive energy.

A clearer idea of what distinguishes a power ballad can be gained by turning to the formulas used in the songs. 'Formulaic' is a common swipe made at the numbers but, putting aside the negative connotations, the term does fit the songs, as they adhere to predictable schemes. With the power ballad, there are both musical and expressive formulas. The schemes define the songs; they are the consistent elements across the various genre guises that the numbers assume. More conventional ballads and other repertoires, to be sure, have employed some or all of the formulaic gestures. What sets the power ballad apart is the degree to which those means have been standardised and how they are used to achieve a more consistently expansive expressive scale from the beginning to the end of a song.

The crux of the musical formula is continual escalation. Power ballads climb up from relatively quiet, introspective openings through a series of expressive plateaus, each more intense than the last. The ascent is made through a gradual increase in dynamics and the size and density of the ensemble. A song usually begins with a lightly scored introduction for acoustic instruments and then switches over to electric instruments or unveils an orchestra. The move to a fuller ensemble coincides with the kick provided by a more dynamic rhythmic accompaniment in the bass and drums. While the ensemble grows, the voice becomes more impassioned. Singers too start quietly and with a vulnerable tone, but they quickly put on ecstatic displays, including elaborate melismas and catapulted high notes. Most, but not all, songs conclude with a wrenching modulation up a step, the cliché hallmark of the power ballad. Long exploited in a range of genres, such sudden shifts have been used to convey

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suspense, surprise and release, among other effects (Ricci 2000; Buchler 2008). The power ballad turns to them to convey release.[4] Musically and emotionally, things have got to such a point that the momentum pushes through and beyond the governing key. In many ways, there is little else that can happen in the final moments, as the voice, dynamics and texture have already soared to extremes. The culmination of all of the 'power' gestures, the modulation serves as the climax of a song, except in a few brazen ballads which, caught up in the escalation, mount one or two more. Some songs close with a brief return to the earlier acoustic passages, a contrast that does not so much re-establish the hushed mood of the opening as put into relief how effusive things have become since then. Not all power ballads follow this scheme exactly. There are numerous exceptions to the formula; there always are with such designs. Nonetheless, the stepwise scheme of escalation provides a consistent, and flexible, formula for the songs.

To illustrate the musical formula there is perhaps no clearer, or bigger, example than Whitney Houston's cover version (1992) of Dolly Parton's 'I Will Always Love You' (1974).[5] Even by the standards of the genre, the scale of Houston's recording is imposing. No other power ballad, including fervent rock songs, climbs as steep a gradient as this one does. Instead of the standard opening for voice and acoustic instruments, it begins at the even more reduced point of voice alone and the use of a free tempo, a starting point that allows for an additional step up the power ballad ladder. With no beat to harry her, Houston moves from word to word in the opening verse and takes her time to ornament each one. After around 40 seconds of this *a cappella* section, the song finally arrives at the point where the typical power ballad begins, the quiet acoustic ensemble, soft singing and light beat heard in the first chorus. From there on, Houston's recording relentlessly expands. The beat grows firmer with the appearance of the drums in the second verse and becomes more emphatic, along with Houston's vocal delivery, in the following chorus section. A sax solo provides a break for Houston but not to the overall escalation, as the sax roughens the melodic timbre and adds to the melismatic play. The ensemble and Houston's vocals actually relax somewhat in the third statement of the verse that comes after the solo, but the drop in intensity is only a set-up for the climactic close. A cavernous pause opens up before the finale, which does not disappoint. It pulls out all the power ballad stops: a spontaneous whole-step modulation to B Major, vocal belting, the highest notes in the vocal part (f#″), and the use of the full ensemble. Like some power ballads, the song quickly winds down with a return to the peaceful opening mood, but even here Houston intensifies things. She closes with a d#″, which, although sung softly, gleams like the high notes just heard in the climax.

Power ballads also rely upon an expressive formula, which consists of two parts: sentimentality and uplift. The songs extend a long line of sentimental ballads that include 19th-century parlour songs, torch songs and some Tin Pan Alley numbers. As captured in these earlier repertoires, sentimentality is defined by the conspicuous effort to be expressive and the resultant emotional displays that come across as excessive, out of proportion to the expressive situation or musical language.[6] Power ballads are surely conspicuous and excessive, what with their seismic modulations and demonstrative performances (think of Céline Dion's signature move of hitting her fist against her chest before big moments). Uplift, the second part of the formula, emerges from the rousing music and performances. These dynamic means create the emotional adrenaline rush that so many listeners find addictive.

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Sentimentality and uplift would seem to be inimical. The former trawls sorrow, as evident in its dependable topics of lost love and death, whereas the latter is the ether of hope and joy. Some power ballads ascend to such optimistic heights, like those paeans to self-esteem, Mariah Carey's 'Hero' (1993) and R. Kelly's 'I Believe I Can Fly' (1996). Most, though, combine the sorrow of sentimentality and the stimulation of uplift. It is this combination that makes the power ballad so unique in both the history of sentimental arts and the ballad.[7] No previous repertoire blended the two so freely, or at all. The music of earlier sentimental numbers usually wavers rather than swells as sadness mounts. What would appear to be a clash actually works in the power ballad. The primary reason it does is that the music adds to the conspicuous efforts to be expressive and the emotional profligacy typical of sentimentality. With power ballads, we get both wringing sorrow and stirring music. The two build upon one another: the woe inspires extroverted vocal displays and the music magnifies romantic anguish.

Most listeners, however, respond more to the musical excitement than to the sorrow. The former, and not the latter, is the unvarying feature of the power ballad. It has been applied to a range of emotions, from the joyful to the depressive. No matter what feelings the lyrics touch upon, the songs follow the same course, leading to euphoria. It is that hyper-impassioned quality that has made them so successful. Euphoria also makes the songs emotionally vague, which may be another reason that they attract such a wide swath of listeners. It is not just that euphoric uplift can be applied to different emotions but that it creates a miasma of emotions, often seemingly contrasting ones. In such overheated emotional climes, sorrow can mingle with elation and all sorts of other feelings. Listeners can draw whatever they want from that mist, including despair, resolve, comfort and exultation. This multifariousness is another way that power ballads differ from previous sentimental arts. Earlier repertoires, like parlour songs and torch songs, distilled emotions, offering listeners concentrated doses of particular feelings. Power ballads, on the other hand, deliver feelings of intensity rather than any one intense feeling. Music is, of course, far from emotionally precise, and listeners respond to pieces with a great deal of latitude. What stands out here, though, is the difference between older repertoires that used specific and highly conventional means to target particular emotions and the power ballad, which whips up euphoric sensations to offer sensations of emotionality.

Houston's recording of 'I Will Always Love You' once again offers an apt example. Based on an earlier type of sentimental song, it reveals the contrasting expressive effects between previous repertoires and power ballads. Parton's original is a country weeper. The category alone places the song in sentimental company, as does its tale of a sad farewell. Realising that she will 'only be in [his] way', Parton decides to leave her lover and tells him not to cry (a hollow injunction in a country weeper) and that she will always love him.[8] As in parlour songs and torch songs, the music wavers as emotions build. Parton's voice trembles more and more until she finally stops singing and speaks the third verse, a humble moment for a singer. Such heartfelt directness makes these spoken soliloquies common in country weepers. In Parton's recording, it makes the third verse, rarely a significant expressive section in a song, the most poignant moment in the number. The spoken words capture Parton's sacrifice and sorrow more touchingly than the lilting melody in the following closing chorus. Houston's expressive high point, on the other hand, comes in the final chorus and is marked by passionate singing, not speech. With the musical

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and expressive momentum in the section, it is hard to know what to feel. The sorrow of parting limned in Parton's original is overwhelmed in the orotund surroundings. Sorrow is still there but it is packed together with such other feelings as elation, resignation, fortitude and sacrifice. Listeners can draw out all sorts of emotions from that sprawl.

Power ballads and ecstatic ballads

The phrase 'power ballad' attained currency in the 1980s and largely referred to ballads sung by rock and heavy metal bands.[9] However, it was not applied exclusively to rock-oriented songs during that decade. For example, *Billboard* brought out the term in reviews under its pop, country and adult contemporary headings.[10] A 1985 songwriting manual by Sheila Davis presents the phrase as a pop category. Evoking a higher authority, she mentions that legendary industry executive and producer Clive Davis uses the phrase and then lists power ballad hits by Barry Manilow ('Mandy', 'I Write The Songs' and 'Weekend in New England'), Melissa Manchester ('Don't Cry Out Loud'), Dionne Warwick ('I'll Never Love This Way Again') and Air Supply ('Come What May') that Davis released at Arista Records during the 1970s and early 1980s (Davis 1985, p. 225). The connection with pop tightened with the recordings of Whitney Houston, Céline Dion and Mariah Carey in the late 1980s and early 1990s. By the mid-1990s, 'power ballad' was more of a pop than a rock designation, although rock power ballads continued to be written and labelled as such. The different usages reinforce the observation made above that power ballads, like ballads in general, traverse genre lines.

The name 'power ballad' gets at the hallmark intensity of the songs and has been doing so longer than commonly realised. As mentioned previously, the phrase pollinated reviews in the early 1980s. But then there is this apparent chronological anomaly. In a 1970 *Billboard* article, Gus Gossert, an 'authority in oldies', observes:

> Both [Tom] Jones and [Engelbert] Humperdinck continually draw upon 'power ballad' tracks that were first brought to us via Elvis Presley and Roy Orbison in 1960 and a little later, Gene Pitney. The 'new' arrangements, however, are less dramatic and less original than their decade-old counterparts. (Gossert 1970, p. 30)

So we have not only power ballads by Tom Jones and Engelbert Humperdinck from around 1970, but also those from around 1960 by Elvis Presley, Roy Orbison and Gene Pitney. Moreover, the earlier songs are more powerful, or 'dramatic', than the later ones. What to make of this? The article reveals that the term 'power ballad' was around much earlier than previously assumed. Its origins are now even more mysterious.[11] With regard to genre, Gossert applies the phrase to different stripes of pop, including the smooth and country-styled ballads emphasised by RCA after Presley was discharged from the military, the interlacing of pop, rock and country in the songs of Orbison and Pitney, the R&B and rock-tinged mid-tempo ballads of Jones, and the mellow, lush arrangements of Humperdinck. Gossert is right in that all five singers are capable of 'power'. It is not clear what 1960 Presley songs Gossert had in mind, but the singer turned out passionate numbers like 'It Hurts Me' (1964) later in the decade. Orbison and Pitney's ballads push to fervent exclamations. Jones thrived on bravado, and Humperdinck could whip up his confectionary sound into peaks.

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That a *Billboard* article would yield one of the first printed traces of the phrase 'power ballad' is not surprising. The magazine musters all sorts of monikers to describe and sort songs for its industry readers, who must process a large number of new releases. During the 1950s and1960s, it compiled a lexicon of catchy names for ballads. The reviews of Orbison and Pitney from the mid-1960s repeated one such name. Orbison is the 'drama-ballad king', and his 'It's Over' (1964) is a 'drama-ballad' that 'builds, builds, builds' (*Billboard* 1964a). Pitney's 'Yesterday's Hero' (1964) is 'a big constantly building drama-ballad' in which 'brass, strings, and voices make the side go up and up' (*Billboard* 1964b). In these and similar numbers, the 'drama' comes from the wailing testimonies of the heartbroken. As used in *Billboard*, the phrase had a relatively short life, appearing in reviews from 1962 to 1964. Before the 'drama ballad', there was the 'big ballad'. That name runs through *Billboard* reviews over a much longer time, from the 1950s through the mid-1960s. Critics used the term in various ways. It could simply refer to a ballad that was a big hit, or it could mean a song that had big passions, which were made all the bigger through big expressive vocals, the accompaniment of a big string section and, sometimes, a big rock and roll beat. With the superlative repetitions loved by the magazine's critics, there could even be 'big, big ballads', like Roy Hamilton's 'In A Dream' (1958), Jerry Simms' 'Dancing Partners' (1959) and Tony Orlando's 'Lonely Tomorrows' (1961) (*Billboard* 1958; 1959; 1961).

'Power ballad', 'drama ballad' and 'big ballad' all describe the same general type of song, one that swells beyond the conventional expressive and musical boundaries of the ballad. So what to call this type of ballad? Or should we call it anything at all? Another adjectival name would only add to an already congested mix. Yet we need to make sense of the different types of ballads in that mix, and a broad heading for these demonstrative songs would help. Such songs have been around for decades and have stood apart from more conventional ballads, a separation acknowledged by the names coined for them. A heading would allow us to group them together and trace their history, a history that plays a crucial part in the larger history of the ballad. We could call them all 'power ballads', but that usage would dilute the meaning of the phrase, which refers to a particular repertory from the 1970s to the present. As such, the power ballad is one part of the larger history of these extroverted songs. As for a name? This article proposes 'ecstatic ballads'. Squarely academic, it would never have been a *Billboard* moniker, but it does capture the dynamic expressive impulse shared by the songs. It is that impulse that generates 'power', creates 'drama' and makes a ballad 'big'.

Where the history of ecstatic ballads begins – a particular repertoire or song – is hard to discern. It all depends on how you measure intensity. One early repertoire that reaches ardent peaks is the Broadway ballad show-stopper, which dates back to 1940s numbers like 'You'll Never Walk Alone' (*Carousel*) and 'Some Enchanted Evening' (*South Pacific*).[12] Those Rodgers & Hammerstein songs have made the show-stopper an evergreen part of the ecstatic ballad tradition, including such later favourites as 'And I'm Telling You I'm Not Going' (*Dreamgirls*) and 'I Dreamed a Dream' (*Les Misérables*). In 1950s popular music, several singers owned the 'big ballad', notably Roy Hamilton (who had a hit with 'You'll Never Walk Alone' in 1954), Al Martino ('Here In My Heart', 1952), Frankie Laine ('I Believe', 1953) and Clyde McPhatter ('Without Love (There is Nothing)', 1957). Then there are the 1960s soul ballads by singers like Aretha Franklin and Otis Redding. Mixing gospel, R&B and pop, the songs brought the ballad to new levels of

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expressive depth and intensity. Besides soul ballads, other kinds of ecstatic ballads climbed the charts in the 1960s and early 1970s, including songs by the five artists mentioned by Gossert as well as such hits as The Righteous Brothers, 'You've Lost That Loving Feeling' (1965), The Guess Who, 'These Eyes' (1968), The Hollies, 'He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother' (1969) and Simon and Garfunkel, 'Bridge Over Troubled Water' (1970).

In the mid-1970s, the power ballad emerges. Gossert, as mentioned above, took the power ballad back to around 1960. The songs by the five performers that he mentions could be placed under the heading of ecstatic ballads or, to be more historically accurate, the Orbison and Pitney numbers could be called 'drama ballads' and the songs by the other three artists 'big ballads'. This may seem to be nothing more than terminological hair-splitting, but it is important to draw a distinction between power ballads and the earlier songs. The former stand out in the history of ecstatic ballads in many ways. Power ballads, for example, have established a more standardised means of escalation. Moreover, they have had a stronger and more consistent presence in popular culture than earlier kinds of ecstatic ballads did, as is evident in the TV shows, movies and video games mentioned above.

Power ballads: the 1970s

To discuss the history of the power ballad, this study breaks down the repertoire into four groups, determined roughly by decade and genre. The first includes the 1970s pop hits of Barry Manilow and songs that rode on their coat tails. The second involves the so-called genesis of the power ballad, 1980s rock and heavy metal. The R&B-infused hits of Whitney Houston, Mariah Carey and others from the late 1980s to the present make up the third category. The fourth takes in the power ballads that sprang up in the genres of teen pop and classical crossover in the 2000s. Each of these groups affords opportunities to discuss particular aspects of the power ballad, including the use of musical and expressive formulas, ways of merging with different genres, and issues of reception.

Barry Manilow invented the power ballad – or so say some journalists (Williams 2007; Das 2008). Manilow concurs: 'I seemed to have invented the power ballad' (Passy 2000). At the time when Manilow was supposedly devising the power ballad in the mid-1970s, the phrase, it appears, was not applied to his songs, at least not in print.[13] Soon, however, it would stick to him. As mentioned above, Sheila Davis's 1985 songwriting manual refers to songs like 'Mandy' and 'Weekend in New England' as power ballads, and she suggests that Clive Davis used the term. That the songs are power ballads *avant la lettre* is not so important, nor is it accurate, considering that the term was in the air as early as 1970. What does stand out is that Manilow has been placed – and has placed himself – at the origins of the power ballad. Critics and listeners familiar with the musical and expressive qualities of songs that have been called power ballads from the 1980s to the present have heard those same qualities in Manilow's 1970s hits. Those qualities are indeed there, and, by moulding them, Manilow and other performers made the power ballad a distinct type of song, not only in the pop scene of the time but also in the history of the ecstatic ballad.

Manilow may not have invented the power ballad, but he did help construct the musical formula employed by the songs. That scheme, called the 'big-bang formula'

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by one reviewer, facilitated the expressive sweep from soft openings to towering conclusions or, as one disparaging critic put it, from 'wispy bits of sentiment' to 'raucous, grandiose production numbers' (Rockwell 1976; Holden 1983). The breadth of that sweep distinguishes the numbers from contemporary ecstatic ballads like The Carpenters' 'Goodbye to Love' (1972), Barbara Streisand's 'The Way We Were' (1973) and Paul Anka and Odia Coates's '(You're) Having My Baby' (1974). Even with swirling strings or electric guitar solos, those songs never reach for the 'climactic' Manilow moment, the final ascending modulation. The modulations became a 'habit' for Manilow, who used them in almost all of his 1970s power ballads (and some up-tempo songs too) (Palmer 1978). Manilow has said that he 'refused' to leave the songs that Clive Davis gave him 'alone and play the piano and [put] icky violins behind them'. He always wanted to create 'huge' songs (Soeder 2007). Lots of violins and the closing modulation were one way of doing that.

Just how big can be heard by comparing 'Mandy' (1974) with the song that it covers, Scott English's 'Brandy' (1971) (Manilow came up with a new rhyming title).[14] 'Brandy' opens with a folk-like feel created by acoustic guitar and other plucked instruments to accompany English's plaintive voice. The recording fortifies the singer's despair over a lost love by adding strings and backup singers as well as more aggressive rock-like drumming in the choruses. In a 2007 interview, Manilow described his version of English's song: 'It started with a little tinkling piano … then it got crazy, with this big backbeat, these big guitar-driven chords and this big ending' (Soeder 2007). A warning should come with that interview: songs may appear bigger in hindsight. Manilow, as he claims, does begin with just piano and builds from there. Each verse and chorus is fuller than the last. There is not, however, much of a backbeat. The entrance of the drums does provide a kick, but the accents fall solidly on beats one and three, not the two and four of a backbeat. Nor are the guitar chords that prominent or driving. While the song may not 'get crazy', the ending is 'big', especially the signature modulation. Manilow sets up the finale by adding a bridge in C Minor that leads back to the chorus in the tonic Bb Major, which is dispersed by the abrupt modulation to C Major. The closing modulation and octave vocal leap would have been unthinkable in English's pop-folk number, but they perfectly suit Manilow's 'huge' ballad.[15]

In subsequent songs, Manilow would take these gestures further. 'Weekend in New England' (1976) becomes symphonic, using strings as well as harp and oboe to create a sonic swirl, and whisks into the final modulation with a crescendo and brief pause. 'I Write the Songs' (1975) features two modulations, both set up just as dramatically. Turning again and again to the 'big-bang formula', Manilow released several other successful power ballads during the next few years: 'Could It Be Magic' (1975), 'Trying to Get the Feeling Again' (1975), 'Looks Like We Made It' (1977), 'Even Now' (1978), 'Ready to Take a Chance Again' (1978), 'Somewhere in the Night' (1978) and 'I Made It Through the Rain' (1981). That he placed nine power ballads in the Top 20 over a seven-year period (from 'Mandy' to 'I Made It Through the Rain') shows how quickly the songs can pervade the charts. His recordings were joined by other early power ballads, including Melissa Manchester, 'Don't Cry Out Loud' (1978) and 'Through The Eyes of Love' (1979), Dionne Warwick, 'I'll Never Love This Way Again' (1979) (both singers were Manilow's studio-mates at Davis's Arista Records), Debby Boone, 'You Light Up My Life' (1977), Dan Hill, 'Sometimes When We Touch' (1977), Neil Diamond, 'Hello Again' (1980) and Kenny Rogers, 'Through The Years' (1981). Not only did power ballads proliferate

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in the charts but, even at this early stage, they had spread into the larger popular culture realm. Several of the songs made their way into films, including 'Ready to Take A Chance Again' (*Foul Play*), 'Through The Eyes of Love' (*Ice Castles*) and 'Hello Again' (*The Jazz Singer*).

Power ballads: 1980s rock

Having become a recognisable type of number in the 1970s, power ballads have changed since then while all the time adhering to the defining formulas. The transformations are the result of the various genre blends formed by the songs. The first prominent blend was the rock power ballads of the 1980s. As mentioned earlier, these songs are *the* power ballad for many listeners, who keep them preserved in the day-glo amber of 1980s rock. Power ballads have, of course, stretched over decades and genres, but the 1980s rock and heavy metal songs are a central part of the repertoire. Given their significance, this study will offer an extended discussion of the mixture of rock and pop genres in the numbers. It will also tap into the debates set off by the commercial success of the songs. Musicians and critics argued over the boundaries between rock and pop, lines shifted or effaced by the numbers and, raising a topic crucial to the power ballad, the two sides disagreed over the types of emotional expression appropriate to rock.

With a series of hits from the early 1980s, REO Speedwagon and Journey figured out ways to bring rock and pop ballads together.[16] Their songs shaped one of the forms that rock power ballads took in the 1980s. They depart from the 1970s pop power ballads in key ways. The musical and emotional climb in the rock songs is not as steep as it is in earlier pop power ballads. Whereas the 1970s numbers open with reflective acoustic passages and conclude with large symphonic forces and a climactic modulation, the rock songs start with acoustic instruments, or a blend of acoustic and electric instruments, and move onto the blare of electric guitars and a driving rock groove, which is drawn out for the rest of the song. REO Speedwagon's 'Keep On Loving You' (1980), for example, begins with piano and accents provided by a high bell sound on the downbeat of every other measure. Blaring chords on the guitar soon replace the bell sound, and midway through the first verse (the b section of an aab design), the drums enter and put down a vigorous rock beat. A second verse leads to the chorus, which colours the rich rock sound by adding synthesiser licks. In songs like 'Who's Crying Now' (1981) and 'Open Arms' (1982), Journey contrast softer verses for acoustic instruments and light drums with choruses set for ringing electric guitars and forceful drumming.

Despite the differences, the songs by both groups push into a sustained propulsive rock idiom, which strikes the emotional sweet spot. As heard in extended rock songs of the 1960s and 1970s, numbers in which both REO Speedwagon and Journey were schooled, that intensity can be drawn out to create an energy into which listeners can disappear. The two bands seek out that energy, using it to build expressive crests. In most long rock songs from the previous two decades, that momentum leads to a guitar solo. REO Speedwagon and Journey follow suit. 'Keep on Loving You' punctuates the first chorus with a solo that features a distorted glissando and pushes well beyond the range of the vocal melody, and 'Who's Crying Now' ends with a solo that lasts for the length of two choruses and begins a third before the fade out. Guitar solos are primed with associations of release and transcendence,

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two qualities that work well in a power ballad. Solos suggest that a new voice has emerged, an entrance that takes a song up another level in the power ballad ascent. None of these songs caps off the ascent with a modulation. The guitar solo remains a truer expressive goal in a rock power ballad.

Although set on that goal, the REO Speedwagon and Journey numbers do take on pop elements, which include the lyrical contours of pop melodies and the use of conventional verse/chorus forms. Regarding the vocal lines, one critic attending a Journey concert remarked upon the mix of 'paint-blistering rock pieces' and melodies that 'would do Melissa Manchester proud', a reference tying the songs to the 1970s pop power ballads (Lacey 1982). For his part, vocalist Steve Perry claimed that he was being 'melodically indulgent' (DiMartino 1981, p. 47). And romantically indulgent too, as the lyrics of the songs entertain romantic topics that would be anathema in most contemporary rock. All of those bedtime whispers and dreams of domestic bliss are pop banalities, not rock cries of anger or rebellion. Bands even penned what one critic called 'greeting-card lyrics: Live every moment – love every day/ 'Cause if you don't you just might throw your love away' (Young 1985, p. 52).[17]

With the success of REO Speedwagon and Journey, rock power ballads quickly multiplied. The songs by the two groups, though, served as more of an inspiration than a model. The progeny tilted the mixtures formed by the two bands further to the pop side. Like them, the newer acts quickly stride from subdued openings to a steady rock intensity, but they rarely move beyond that point to a guitar solo. If they do play one, it is usually briefer and tied more tightly to the vocal melodies than in the REO Speedwagon and Journey songs. Moreover, the solo guitar is often part of a varied, and less classic-rock, ensemble, one in which synthesisers can be just as prominent as guitars. Singer Ann Wilson of Heart described the 'gel' of 'big synthesizers' in 'What About Love', a glutinous sound that replaces the old roar of electric guitars (Aaron 2003, pp. 129–30). This later stripe of rock power ballad also relies heavily on standard verse/chorus forms, usually repeating a chorus over and over at the end of a song rather than concluding with a guitar solo. The thicker pop-oriented blends are not surprising given that the acts who released them straddled the line between pop and rock, with some more on the pop side (Corey Hart, Mr Mister, Air Supply and Bonnie Tyler) and others on the rock side (Foreigner, Loverboy and Survivor). Heart, they of the 'big synthesizers', was a rock group converted to the power ballad. A 'wonder band' of the 1970s, the group came close to breaking up in the early 1980s (Bell 1986, p. 31). A new producer, Don Grierson, encouraged them to play 'outside songs', that is, power ballads, in their resurrection album *Heart* (1985), which includes two such hit numbers, 'What About Love' and 'These Dreams' (Holden 1988).

If individual songs shifted the weight between rock and pop, so too did opinions of the power ballad. The words 'power' and 'ballad' formed two sides of a scale, which was rarely in balance in views of the songs. How the scale titled depended on what one thought of the numbers. Musicians performing them emphasised the rock – or 'power' – side in an attempt to fend off jibes that they were turning out pop blather – in other words, pop ballads. REO Speedwagon lead vocalist Kevin Cronin, for example, upheld the group's rock credentials: 'REO Speedwagon has always been a rock & roll band, but we learned we could play ballads and still have them be real powerful.' Lead guitarist Gary Richrath backed him up by citing

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a classic rock precedent: 'Yeah, like what Led Zeppelin did with 'Stairway to Heaven', which starts out acoustic and builds up' (Henke 1981, p. 48). Grierson, the producer who brought Heart to the power ballad, held that 'the very emotional [power ballads] retain enough of a rock edge so that album radio programmers don't think that they are wimpy' (Holden 1988).

Radio play comes up frequently in the 1980s reception of the power ballad. Beginning in the late 1960s, rock settled into the Album Oriented Rock format mentioned by Grierson, which embraced the length and complexity of 1960s and 1970s idioms and, in doing so, attracted small, but loyal, audiences. These bastions became increasingly smaller and less commercially viable as FM stations grew more and more pop oriented, exemplified by the industry label Contemporary Hit Radio that emerged in the early 1980s. Under commercial pressures and out of their own musical interests, some rock musicians cultivated styles that could find their way onto those stations. The power ballad perfectly suited such programming. Hearing the songs thrive on bigger stations, rock loyalists dismissed the numbers as 'bland corporate fodder for the FM masses' and as 'tailor-made' for the 'conservative' playlists of FM radio (Hilburn 1981a; 1981b; DiMartino 1982, p. 41). The familiar cry of 'sellout' rings once again in rock criticism. It is a cry that reinforces notions of authenticity that define rock, particularly those ideals based on anti-commercialism and the artistic distance kept from pop styles.[18] According to these views, rock is a music that resists the pelf and clichés of pop. Commercial temptations, though, increased in the 1980s with the prominence of music video and Top 40 radio, and not all musicians could resist them, or so thought some reviewers.[19] About that decade, one critic remarked: 'Artists seemed to be tripping over themselves in their eagerness to sell out' (DeCurtis 1992, pp. 5–6). For many, the power ballad was the anthem of commercial eagerness.

Then there were the heavy metal power ballads that emerged in the 1980s. Such songs may seem to be an aberration, so far apart are heavy metal and ballads. Yet not only do the songs exist, but they also made it all the way up the pop charts.[20] *Rolling Stone* writer Jeffrey Ressner tallied that, with their ballads, Bon Jovi, Def Leppard and Guns N' Roses 'delivered as many Number One Hits in four months [Fall 1988] as the entire hard-rock and metal field had in the preceding two decades' (Ressner 1989, p. 22). To that successful line-up could be added the American groups Mötley Crüe, Poison, Whitesnake and Warrant, the German groups Scorpions and Accept, and the British band Slade. The songs also flourished on video. Mötley Crüe's 'Home Sweet Home' (1985) became so frequently requested that MTV devised the 'Crüe Rule', which stated that no video could hold the status of most-requested for more than three months (Aaron 2003, p. 133).

One reason for the popularity of the songs is that they won over a new audience for heavy metal, particularly a large female one or, as critic David Fricke put it, 'the Top 40 housewives and their daughters' (Fricke 1989, p. 46).[21] This remark snags the gender issues that abound in heavy metal. Those issues tie into aspects of emotional expression germane to the power ballad. Regarding the 'the Top 40 housewives and their daughters', the line corroborates a long-standing link made between the feminine and mass culture, especially the manufacturing of romantic fantasies (Huyssen 1986, pp. 44–62). Here, Fricke stamps women with the adjective 'Top 40', which is often used to denigrate music viewed as catering to pedestrian tastes, and he dismisses power ballads as sentimental pabulum.

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Throughout his article, Fricke attempts to cordon off a masculine rock from the feminine. In general, it is a foolhardy undertaking to draw gender lines in heavy metal, as the genre has long wrapped itself in the androgynous.[22] The wrap was particularly tight with the 1980s hair metal groups that put out power ballads. That scene flaunted glam excess, the outfits brocaded with sequins, calligraphic eyeliner and, of course, halo-like blow-dried hair.[23] Besides that look, there is another kind of androgyny, a mix of types of emotional expression considered to be masculine and feminine. The strutting, screeching singers and, of course, long solos on the phallic guitar in heavy metal affirm established notions of masculinity.[24] Singing about love and loss in highly emotional ways, on the other hand, accords with perceptions of the feminine. Men, according to such views, do not entertain such sentimental thoughts or lose control of their feelings and sing in vulnerable ways. Having violated those ideals, male ballad singers have often been referred to as either effeminate or gay. For example, the early crooners, with their soft, intimate wooing, were depicted as effeminate (McCracken 1999). With his 1970s power ballads, Manilow sometimes attracted such crude innuendoes, or sometimes outright homophobic attacks as in a *Creem* magazine review by Lester Bangs. He mocks the 'sheer pap appeal' of Manilow's songs and mentions how the 'faggots love it'. According to Bangs, the giddy emotionality of Manilow's music is 'like being told that you can suck cock at Disney World' (Bangs 1974, p. 22). The rock and heavy metal press lashed power ballad groups with misogynistic and homophobic taunts. One critic said that members of Mötley Crüe 'are often mistaken for ugly women' (Gerard 1987, p. 34). A writer for the heavy metal magazine *Metallion* compared the band Accept to Manilow for having 'the world slavering in puddles of happy drool'. As if the connection with Manilow was not enough, the article insinuates that the lyrics and looks of the group seem gay, but then surprisingly downplays those aspersions and assures readers that the music is indeed heavy metal (Simmons 1985, p. 17).

Heavy metal groups offered similar reassurances, and there was perhaps no better place to do so than in the popular music videos. The videos typically divide a band's life into two worlds. There are sentimental scenes of romantic love, weddings, sepia shots of past times, and the domestic life left behind by traveling musicians.[25] Contrast that with the shots of a band on stage performing before an ecstatic crowd. The stage shows come across as overcompensation, using the masculine antics of heavy metal to fend off rumblings about effeminacy and homosexuality. At the same time, those protestations reveal how much these groups wanted to draw upon the expressive qualities of the ballad, even as they pushed them away because of the gender and sexual associations raised by the songs. The ballad and heavy metal, as depicted in the videos, were indeed worlds apart, but they could come together in a way that allowed the bands to have both ballad tenderness and heavy metal bravado. The bands found a way in the emotional amplitude of the power ballad. The expressive cloud created by the songs is big enough to hold the different emotional, musical and gender associations of the two genres. Indeed, heavy metal ballads make that cloud bigger and more electric by amping up the expressive formula of the power ballad. Prime sentimental topics are inflated through not just rousing music but rather through pulsating music. The emotional frenzy created by the songs was enough to make both female and male fans at the time believe that, as critic Ann Powers puts it, 'sentimentality was all right' (Powers 1988).[26]

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Heavy metal groups also turned up the musical formula of the power ballad. They adapted the formula in a manner similar to 1980s rock groups, but did so in an appropriately much bigger way. 'Home Sweet Home', for example, heightens the standard transition from acoustic instruments to louder, thicker forces. The solo piano of the opening verse meets not just electric guitar chords but rather the ringing 'power' chords characteristic of heavy metal.[27] As was to be expected, heavy metal groups gave the guitar solo a more prominent role than in many of the rock power ballads. Poison's 'Every Rose Has Its Thorn' (1988) features two solos, which contrast with the earlier acoustic 'cowboy' rock sections and take the listener into what is an euphoric moment for metal, one that can be just as exhilarating for a power ballad. Some bands even utilise the final stepwise modulation. Warrant's 'Heaven' (1989) gets closer to the heavens with two harmonic ascents in the last minute of the song.

Commercial success proved just as contentious in the heavy metal scene as it did in the rock world, perhaps even more so as heavy metal was further removed from mainstream markets. Having staked out the fringe, its core audience identified itself through contempt for pop styles. As Metallica lead vocalist James Hetfield said, fans 'freaked out' when hearing a ballad on an album, asking 'what the fuck is this doing here' (Crunch 1986, p. 17). The songs were not, as Accept guitarist Wolf Hoffman succinctly stated, 'pure metal'(Simmons 1985, p. 17).[28] For many, they were pure profit.[29] Lonn Friend, executive editor of heavy metal magazine *R.I.P.*, upbraided bands for putting out 'toned-down, wimped-out stuff' so as to get on the radio (Ressner 1989, p. 22). Hetfield thought that ballads were soul destroying: 'That shit just limits you, and your world gets smaller and smaller' (Crunch 1986, p. 17). However, as with the rock ballads, there were defenders. Surprisingly the line of defence was built along an aspect of the songs most despised by some, their emotional appeal. A review of Mötley Crüe's *Theatre of Pain* album (1985) in *Metallion*, for example, praises the 'soulful' qualities of 'Home Sweet Home' and calls the song 'a grabber that has a good chance of crossing over to a wider audience' (Gett and Stoute 1985, p. 23). In a discussion of the appeal of heavy metal power ballads for women, a *Rock & Roll Confidential* critic argued that, as 'dissolute' as Guns N' Roses may be, their 'Sweet Child of Mine' (1988) is 'as sensitive as anything that Tracy Chapman has to offer' and that the evocation of loneliness and comfort in the song 'speaks to every latch-key kid and latch-key parent in America' (Ladies Choice 1988, p. 1).

The song obviously touched more than the latch-key contingent, as it became yet another number one heavy metal power ballad. The popularity of the numbers, though, would not last. By the early 1990s, the austere gloom of grunge entranced rock-friendly mainstream audiences. In heavy metal, bands turned away from the lavishness of hair metal and pursued a myriad of stripped-down styles, including grunge and the thrash metal style shaped by Metallica. Some bands lampooned ballads. Anthrax's 'Nice Fucking Ballad' (1991), for example, recites one romantic cliché after another to the accompaniment of acoustic guitar before abruptly ending with the not-so-cliché line 'she got hit by a truck' and the ludicrous wailing of the band members. However, despite the sharp turn away from the songs, the heavy metal power ballad never died out. In the 1990s, Aerosmith enjoyed success with the songs 'Crazy' (1994) and 'I Don't Want To Miss a Thing' (1998). The heavy metal power ballad even experienced a revival in the 2000s, with the success of bands like Creed and Staind (Reesman 2001).

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Power ballads: 1980s–1990s R&B

As the heavy metal power ballad took off in the mid-1980s, the power ballad was blending with R&B idioms. The union proved immediately successful with Whitney Houston's eponymous 1985 debut album which, along with the 1987 successor *Whitney*, yielded such power ballad hits as 'Greatest Love of All', 'Didn't We Almost Have It All' and 'Where Do Broken Hearts Go'. Arista Records released the albums and Houston worked with Clive Davis, which gave the recordings the pedigree of the Manilow, Manchester and Warwick (Houston's aunt) hits of the 1970s. Tied to the pop power ballad, the albums also welcomed the talents of R&B musicians, among them Teddy Pendergrass, Jermaine Jackson, Kashif, and Chuck Jackson. Houston's imaginative musicianship and stylistically flexible voice inspired the merger, revealing how fecund it could be. As with Davis's Manilow albums, Houston's recordings cleared a path that a diverse group of musicians would follow, among them R&B divas Mariah Carey and Toni Braxton, white R&B singer Michael Bolton, and black and white boy bands like Boyz II Men, Backstreet Boys, *NSYNC and 98 Degrees.

The R&B power ballad was not a shrewd musical product hatched one day at Arista Records; rather, the songs are part of a much broader merger. On one side is the pop ballad and, on the other, a range of vocal practices that flow between such African American genres as the blues, gospel and R&B. The practices include melismatic ornamentation, pitch inflections, call and response, moans, shouts, belting and speech.[30] They are expressive elements that take root in all sorts of songs, and ballads have always attracted potent gestures wherever they may come from. Given the reciprocity, there has been a long-standing exchange between African American idioms and the ballad, which has offered such fruits as Duke Ellington's ballads ('Satin Doll'), Harold Arlen's blues-inflected songs ('Blues in the Night') and James Brown's 1950s beseeching ballads ('Please, Please, Please'). The 1960s soul ballads of Ray Charles, Otis Redding and Aretha Franklin stirred a thick, perhaps unprecedentedly thick, mix of African American and pop genres, including gospel, R&B, the blues, country, rock and pop. Through these combinations, soul ballads introduced African American idioms further into the ballad repertoire than ever before. The genre blends created in soul ballads became the core of R&B ballads, a repertoire that took shape in the early 1970s.[31] Slowing down the grooves of R&B and partaking in the above vocal exclamations, the numbers enhance moods of seduction and sorrow, to name the two most common affects. Among the leading practitioners of these growling and sobbing songs are Marvin Gaye, Al Green, Barry White, Teddy Pendergrass, Luther Vandross, Stephanie Mills and Anita Baker.

R&B ballads eventually seeded the R&B power ballad. As similar as the names may be, there are distinctions between the two. The differences emerge in the kinds of emotional expression cultivated by each. Power ballads aspire to grandness, whereas R&B ballads reject such puffery. R&B ballads can be intense, as they extend moods of romance and woe, but they prefer to ride out a mood and a groove rather than build to mammoth heights. Nonetheless, the songs abound with expressive resources that can be used by power ballads to reach such peaks. In listening to R&B power ballads, the question becomes what elements of R&B styles are taken up in the songs and which ones are not.

For power ballads, the most valuable resources in R&B ballads have been the vocal practices in those songs and other African American genres. In their original

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context, such gestures convey bursts of emotions so effusive that words melt into melody and notes leap into the air and resound. Power ballads not only use them for expressive gushes but also to sustain the grinding emotional escalation, as more and more of them are heaped on as a song progresses. Melismas became so common in R&B power ballads and, through their example, other types of songs that one writer claimed that they were 'rampant' in contemporary popular music, most notably in performances on *American Idol* (Rosen 2003).[32] A comparison of R&B ballads and R&B power ballads reveals how excessively the latter has employed melismas. In recordings by Green and Vandross, both singers judiciously apply melismas to highlight key words or to round off phrases. With R&B power ballads, melismas become filler, added to any word, even utilitarian prepositions and articles, and often result in distended phrases. They have become a rather cheap means of expression, so handy that singers unfurl them so as to make a song seem more emotional. In 'One Sweet Day' (1995) by Mariah Carey and Boyz II Men, for example, Carey and the group's lead singer Wanya Morris try to outdo each other in stretching out melismas and swirling more of them around the unadorned melody lines laid out by the other singers in the group. That the song is one of mourning and reflection can get lost in the melodic tinsel.

R&B power ballads also lay down the rhythmic foundation of R&B ballads, which consists of slow, sluggish beats, emphasis on beats two and four, and syncopated patterns in bass and drums. On top of that foundation, R&B ballads add layers that fluidly interconnect so as to build grooves. R&B power ballads, on the other hand, stick with just the foundation and do not construct anywhere near as intricate rhythmic lattices around it. In 'One Sweet Day', for example, the song rests upon a pattern consisting of an emphasis on beats one and three in the bass and hits on two and four by higher-range percussion. During the choruses and conclusion, more layers are added, but they rest within that pattern and never grow as independent as they might in an R&B song. In terms of the expressive needs of 'One Sweet Day' and R&B power ballads in general, such a basic R&B groove is enough. It connects the songs to the R&B repertoire and to the valued associations of soulfulness held by that music, which enhance the fervent mourning of Carey's song.[33] Moreover, the rhythmic groundwork provides a generic context for the R&B vocal practices used so copiously in R&B power ballads, gestures that would sound out of place against a more standard pop or rock rhythmic backing.

If power ballads exaggerate the vocal gestures of R&B ballads and downplay the rhythmic spontaneity of the numbers, they outright reject the shape of those songs. The shape of the typical R&B ballad consists of a steady expansion in the size of the ensemble and dynamics, which culminates in a closing passage based on the repetition of a rhythmic phrase over which the vocalist can indulge in melismas and cries.[34] Such heightened repetitive passages occur in a variety of African American idioms, including the final blowouts in swing band stomps, the drive sections in gospel performances or the seemingly perpetual conclusions of funk songs.[35] In R&B ballads, the sections concentrate a mood, such as that of seduction in Pendergrass' 'Turn off the Lights' (1979) or joy in Mills' 'I Have Learned to Respect the Power of Love' (1986). It would seem that this shape would be ideal for a power ballad. Not only do the songs get bigger but the design also allows for the vocal ornamentation prized by R&B power ballads. The shape, though, is too broad and the ascent too gradual. R&B power ballads, like power ballads in general, rise quickly and steeply. Moreover, they typically do not end with an extended

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repetition section but rather, like a pop song, conclude with a final statement, or sometimes two statements, of the chorus. The scale of an R&B ballad is not grand enough to accommodate the concluding build -up of a power ballad, especially the final stepwise modulation. To reach a big finale, R&B power ballads stick with the trusted formulas of the power ballad and not the soulful exits of R&B styles, no matter how expressive they may be.

Power ballads: the 2000s

Ubiquitous in the early 1990s, R&B power ballads have remained a prominent part of the pop mix since then. During that decade, all of the different kinds of power ballad genre blends could be found in the charts, proving how adaptable and popular the formulas of the songs had become. Rock power ballads were still out there, and the 1970s pop power ballad was thriving, largely thanks to one performer. In songs like 'It's All Coming Back to Me Now' (1996) and 'My Heart Will Go On' (1997), Céline Dion bounds each step of the power ballad musical formula to reach splendiferous vocal finales. Around 2000, two other types of power ballad emerged, those involving classical crossover and teen pop. Although never as widely popular as the other blends, the two merit discussion, for they reveal much about the status of the power ballad at the time. Both genres depend on recognisable, even cliché types of songs and by 2000 the power ballad was surely that. Moreover, classical crossover and teen pop use the musical and expressive formulas in bald ways, barely modifying them so as to make clear to listeners what kind of song they are getting. The power ballad had not only become a familiar type of song but it had also become a dependable emotional script.

Classical crossover mixes elements of classical music, especially the operatic voice, use of foreign languages, and orchestral arrangements, with other distinct genres like sacred music, folk and pop. The latter genres make the classical idioms more accessible by providing a familiar context, while allowing listeners to partake in the valued sophistication of classical music. That sophistication in turn polishes the other genres, making them more than hymns, folk tunes or pop songs. A similar exchange occurs with the power ballad. The songs render operatic stylings less off-putting to listeners. Moreover, the numbers welcome operatic pretence; big voices can find a home in a kind of song designed for big voices and expressive moments. Operatic, or opera-like, voices make the already dramatic power ballad all the more so. The results can be new power ballads with operatic vocal stylings, like Josh Groban's 'You Are Loved (Don't Give Up)' (2006), or operatic versions of existing power ballads, such as Il Divo's 'Regresa a Mi' (2004, a Spanish-language cover of Toni Braxton's 'Unbreak My Heart'). Even with the operatic posturing, both songs stick to the power ballad path, following it step by step to euphoria.

Teen pop refers to music played by teenagers for teenagers or, as more and more gauged by the industry, tweens (ages 8–12). The music emphasises genres with clear musical and expressive characteristics, which allow young, relatively unschooled listeners to know immediately what they are getting. Rock idioms, for example, convey anger and grit, perfect for the displays of punkish pique in Avril Lavigne songs (enjoyed by many adults as well). The power ballad provides expressive songs, the biggest and most expressive songs there are, or so suggest the uses of the songs in movies and television. Through the rote use of the formula, the

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recordings let listeners know that they are hearing a kind of number that has proved to be moving. The songs can balloon all types of feelings, particularly those of self-esteem (Miley Cyrus, 'The Climb', 2009) and love (The Jonas Brothers, 'When You Look Me in the Eyes', 2008).

Conclusion

By the 2000s, the power ballad had not only become a recognisable type of song but it also became a song with a history. Compiling numbers from the 1970s to the present, numerous CD collections have chronicled that history. The over-the-top titles of some of them have drawn inspiration from their subject: *Bigger, Better Power Ballads*, *Monster Ballads* and *Power Ballads: The Greatest Driving Anthems in the World . . . Ever!* Following their lead, this study will close with a historical glance backwards, not to the power ballad but rather much further back, to the ballad repertoire in general over the last 80 or so years. No CD set has scoured such a vast repertoire. That would be more of a musicological undertaking than a recording company project. If there ever were such a compilation, listeners would take a music history lesson from it. They would notice a significant shift in the expressive tone of the songs – a shift toward more demonstrative, rousing numbers.

To use a term coined here, there has been a shift toward 'ecstatic ballads' since around 1960. Ballad types in the first half of the 20th century rarely reach for grand gestures. They achieve an expressive impact through more understated means. In torch songs from the 1920s and 1930s, for example, the music quakes and breaks, all of which leads to tears. Crooning styles arose in the 1920s with the ability of the microphone to pick up light voices and whispers (McCracken 1999). Crooning became a vocal ideal through the 1950s. During that decade, the mellow crooning voice thrived in the mellifluous sound world of hi-fi stereo, where voices and instruments get lush but never fervid.

The 'big ballads', 'drama ballads', and their ilk broke away from such restraint, joined later by soul ballads, R&B ballads and power ballads. Of these, the power ballad has had the strongest influence on present-day ballad styles. While not bound to the formula, a large number of songs use parts of it to reach for impassioned heights. Those heights have set a new expressive level in the ballad repertoire, making it sometimes difficult to say what is a power ballad and what is not. Rather than trying to draw a distinction, it would be more insightful to observe that there are a lot of ecstatic ballads out there, including power ballads. Indeed, ecstatic ballads have become the norm. There are, of course, exceptions, like the singer/songwriter repertoire and alternative styles, but the average ballad on the pop charts today typically uses emphatic expressive means.

This new norm says much about the kinds of emotional experiences valued in contemporary popular culture. Emotions are to be large, indiscriminate and immediate. Reality TV shows, sports broadcasting and romantic films have all catered to such tastes by turning people's life stories, be they real or fictional, into emotional crescendos that culminate in euphoric flights and blissful conclusions. A nobody becomes a star singer; an athlete overcomes struggles in a fervent triumphant moment; and a young couple overcomes banal plot obstacles to enjoy a stirring romance. All of these outcomes can be, and have been, celebrated with power ballads. The prevalence of the songs across different media suggests that they have

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become the ideal vehicle for such ecstatic experiences. In three minutes, they can absorb listeners in a mass of grand, if not disparate, emotions.

These closing panoramic shots of both the history of the ballad and contemporary popular culture demonstrate how revelatory a genre the power ballad is for historical study. For songs that have been neglected in the scholarly literature, they have much to tell us. A history of the numbers shows how common the longings for superlative emotions have become and how much ballads have changed since the middle of the 20th century to service those desires. To sing a ballad during the last few decades has been to sing intensely, loudly, and even with power.

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Endnotes

1. There has yet to be an academic study devoted to the power ballad. Two rich discussions offered by popular music critics are Eddy (1997) and Aaron (2003). See also Kelly (2008).
2. The defining features of the ballad and its place in the field of popular music genres have not received that much attention. Notable exceptions include Forte (1995) and Frith (2001).
3. From the second half of the 19th century to the present, the term 'ballad' has been used in popular music in three general ways. The first is that of a strophic song that usually narrates a story. The second is as a general heading for 'a simple song of popular character' that does not feature comic topics or use slang, both of which are features of the larger contrasting repertory of 'novelty songs' (Wickes 1916, p. 6; Lincoln 1931, p. 30). The third, and the usage adopted in this article, is that of slow songs dealing with themes of love or loss. The second conception died out by the 1940s, but the first and third endure. Although the strophic ballad has little, if any, presence in present-day popular music, the name 'ballad' alone is enough to conjure up such songs for many listeners (perhaps because of the reappearance of the form and title during the folk revival movement of the 1950s and 1960s). It was the dominant usage during the first half of the 19th century, but during the second half of the century, the term 'ballad' began to refer to songs fitting the second and third categories mentioned above in addition to strophic songs. By the early 20th century, writers would routinely draw distinctions between the former two categories and the older strophic numbers. Looking back to the 1880s, lyricist Edward B. Marks mentions the 'story ballad type' ballad and 'sentimental' or 'sob' ballads (Marks 1934, pp. 44, 49, 73). Commenting on Tin Pan Alley songs, Sigmund Spaeth separates 'the original ballads' or 'authentic ballads of our folk-music' from the 'the up-to-date ballads of Irving Berlin' (Spaeth 1934, pp. 33, 34, 91). On understandings of the term 'ballad' from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, see Tawa (1980, p. 9; 1990, pp. 162–7, 199–203) and Hamm (1997, pp. 140–45).
4. In a brief remark on power ballads, Simon Frith describes them as 'songs of feeling bottled up and bursting out; musical, emotional, and sexual release somehow all equated' (Frith 2001, p. 101).
5. A comparison of the Parton and Houston recordings can be found in Rischar (2004, pp. 419–22).
6. On these and other aspects of sentimentality, see Douglas (1977), Tompkins (1985) and Howard (1999). For discussion of aspects of sentimentality in the parlour song repertoire, see Tawa (1980, pp. 46, 75) and Key (1995).
7. Lauren Berlant describes the 'transcendence' offered by sentimental arts. Having taken on the suffering of others, consumers of those arts can feel emotionally enriched. This form of uplift, though, depends on identification with pain and sorrow, rather than being swept away by the euphoria unleashed by power ballads. It is the melding of sorrow and euphoria that makes the songs such a new, and important, addition to the history of sentimentality (Berlant 2008).
8. Parton wrote the tune as a response to her parting with her mentor Porter Wagoner. The song, though, can also be heard as a lover's farewell, as Parton used it in the 1982 film version of the musical *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas*. After Houston's success with the number, Parton later recorded a new power ballad version with Vince Gill in 1995.
9. A few words should be said about the label 'power pop', which appeared sometime in the

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late 1960s. During the next two decades, the label stuck to such acts as The Knack, The Romantics, The Shoes and XTC. All these bands fortified pop lyrics and catchy melodies with the boisterous guitar riffs and drumming of rock. The phrase was not originally applied to ballads, perhaps because they were considered irredeemably pop, beyond the power pop treatment. With the rise of the power ballad, the phrase 'power pop' was occasionally used to describe such songs. A review of Heart, for example, mentions the group's 'brand of melodic arena-rock, lead-guitar spiced power pop anthems' (Trakin 1987, p. 18).

10. The magazine classified power ballad hits by Foreigner, Heart and Night Ranger as pop instead of rock. The former heading, as discussed below, captures the opinion that these acts had crossed the lines from rock to pop in releasing these songs. Some more straightforward pop singles were called power ballads, like Olivia Newton John's 'Silvery Rain' (*Billboard* 1982). In the country section, Billy Chinnock's 'Man on the Line' was considered to be a power ballad (*Billboard* 1985). As for Adult Contemporary, Viktim's 'Night Living' was upheld as a power ballad (*Billboard* 1986).
11. The term may have emerged from the same slang smithy as 'power pop' did in the late 1960s, but perhaps not.
12. Before the 1940s, there were singers who were known for demonstrative, dynamic styles of singing, notably Al Jolson. In the 1930s and 1940s there were also ballads sung by opera singers or singers with some operatic training, which have a larger expressive range and size than contemporary ballads. Such singers include Lawrence Tibbett ('Without A Song', 1930), Richard Crooks ('Gipsy Moon', 1932), Joseph Schmidt ('My Song Goes Round the World', 1933), Grace Moore ('One Night of Love', 1934) and Richard Tauber ('My Heart and I', 1943).
13. I have not found any reviews or articles on Manilow from the 1970s that use the term, which, of course, is not to say that the term was not applied to his music during that time.
14. The song was co-written by English and Richard Kerr. It was released in the UK in 1971 and the United States a year later.
15. It should come as little surprise that there has been a power ballad, or more powerful ballad, remake of Manilow's 'Mandy'. Westlife's 2003 recording of the song exceeds Manilow's, through yearning solo and group vocals, bigger orchestration and, as seen in the video, fireworks to mark the final modulation.
16. Throughout the previous decades, there were other types of slow rock songs being created, some of which could be called ballads. During the 1970s, rock musicians, seeking alternatives to the slow blues songs common in the 1960s, came up with all sorts of slow numbers, including acoustic songs (Kiss, 'Beth' and Alice Cooper, 'You and Me'), slow parts in long multi-sectional numbers (Led Zeppelin, 'Stairway to Heaven', Queen, 'Bohemian Rhapsody' and Styx, 'Come Sail Away'), and Gothic metal dramas (Aerosmith, 'Dream On'). All of these examples have been upheld as proto power ballads, as in various CD compilations and websites (see also Aaron 2003). As defined here, a power ballad, whatever the genre or genre mixture, follows a specific formula. None of the above songs adheres to that scheme, although they may have features of it. Despite coming up with different types of slow numbers during the 1970s, rock musicians did not draw upon the power ballad formula being developed by pop musicians at the time. They would, though, exploit it in the early years of the 1980s.
17. Young may slight the lyrics but he admits to finding them 'heartwarming' – proof of how even hardened rock critics could fall prey to the clichés of power ballads. The lyrics that he cites are from the REO Speedwagon song 'Live Every Moment'.
18. On notions of authenticity in rock, see Frith (1981; 1998), Coyle and Dolan (1999), Warren-Zanes (1999), Moore (2002), Dettmar (2006) and Barker and Taylor (2007).
19. Some of those same reviewers could not resist overlooking commercial success as they did with Bruce Springsteen's *Born in the U.S.A* (1984), which was one of the most popular albums of the decade. Those same critics viewed Springsteen as a paragon of rock authenticity. On that inconsistency, see Frith (1988, pp. 99–101).
20. Discussing Bon Jovi's 1986 album, *Slippery When Wet*, Robert Walser sees a peaceful, and even 'transcendent', union between heavy metal idioms and the 'romantic sincerity of a long tradition of pop' (Walser 1993, pp. 120–4).
21. Cliff Burnstein, manager of Metallica and Def Leppard, used a similar phrase in referring to Metallica's 'One', which is about a double-amputee veteran, and starts off slow and then builds from there: 'This is no Robin Zander-Ann Wilson love theme from some current movie. We're not exactly going for the housewives and daughters on this' (Ressner 1989, p. 22). As offensive as these remarks may be, they do touch upon the commercial reality that women made up the biggest part of the Top 40 audience (Ross 1988, p. 1).
22. On androgyny in heavy metal, see Walser (1993).
23. If that description does not conjure up a clear enough mental picture, then try this one from a 1984 article on Mötley Crüe: 'Art-wrecko cherubs squeezed into dead black cow, looking like lifesize ads for Frederick of Hollywood's fetish department, their heels stilettoed, their wrists studded, their chests chained, their crotches armored, and, topping the lot like a maraschino cherry on a chocolate *gateau*, the most unacceptably glorious brightly-dyed shag-cuts this side of the early '70s!' (Simmons 1984a, p. 44).
24. On the associations of masculinity raised by heavy metal performances, see Fast (2001).
25. Examples of such divisions can be seen in the videos for Mötley Crüe's 'Home Sweet Home' and Guns N' Roses's 'November Rain'.

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26. Powers mentions later power ballads by Pearl Jam and Matchbox 20 and how those songs turn away from the sentimentality of the earlier 1980s songs.
27. 'Power' chords refer to chords that are built upon a fifth and octave (no thirds). The name is also applied loosely to ringing, distorted guitar sonorities.
28. Hoffmann is pointing a finger at fellow German band Scorpions, which released several successful ballads. For his part, Scorpions singer Klaus Meine did not see ballads as antithetical to heavy metal but rather as intrinsic to the group's sound and history: 'We have two very strong directions in our music. The one direction, the very strong, powerful, hot and heavy side, and the other one is very gentle, melodic ballads side. They were always two very important directions of Scorpions' (Simmons 1984b, p. 22).
29. Some industry insiders would admit as much. PolyGram Records (label for Def Leppard, Bon Jovi and Cinderella) executive Steven Kleinberg remarked: 'Our bands aren't stupid. You don't have to say to a band "These songs are great, but give us a ballad". They know what singles are going to motivate album sales' (Ressner 1989, p. 22).
30. On the history and role of these elements in African American music, see Floyd (1996).
31. It can be difficult to draw a clear distinction between soul and R&B. Indeed, some of the R&B ballad singers listed here have been labelled as soul singers. R&B is a long-standing and spacious heading that has accommodated all sorts of black urban genres, including soul, at one time or another. Although still around today (and enjoying an old-school revival), soul came into its own during the 1960s, after which elements of the genre seeped into R&B idioms.
32. Seven years after Rosen's article, *The New York Times* ran an article declaring the death (a premature announcement, for sure) of the melisma with the popularity of singers like Lady Gaga, Katy Perry and Ke$ha, who favour shorter, punchier melodic lines (Browne 2010). For a discussion of the role played by vocal ornamentation in R&B ballads from the early 1990s, see Rischar 2004.
33. The prominent gospel elements in the song also add associations of soulfulness to the mix.
34. In his article on 1990s R&B ballads, Rischar describes the overall shape of the songs across verse and chorus sections. He does not focus on the larger escalation of intensity in the R&B power ballads that he discusses, nor does he ever refer to power ballads (Rischar 2004).
35. Rischar mentions the similarities between gospel drive sections and the conclusion of R&B ballads (Rischar 2004, pp. 432–3).

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