



Rock and roll grandads



By Chris Rose

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In 2005 The Rolling Stones released an album called “A Bigger Bang”. Many critics, as usual, chose it as their favourite of the year. This isn’t very surprising, but if you think that “A Bigger Bang” was their 25th album now the Rolling Stones have been around for more than 40 years, and that singer Mick Jagger, guitarist Keith Richards and the other musicians are all well into their 60s, and are all grandfathers, it starts to look a bit strange. The idea of my grandfather standing on a stage in front of thousands of people singing “I Can’t Get No Satisfaction” is just embarrassing. Can you imagine your grandfather doing it?



But the Rolling Stones are not an exception. Last year, ex-Beatle Paul McCartney also released a new record. He worked with the producer of the band Radiohead to give himself a more modern sound. His record only had limited success, but again thousands of people came out to see the man when he played live concerts. Many young people still listen to Madonna, as well. She is regarded as being an exciting contemporary artist, even though she has now been making records for more than 20 years and is in her late 40s. Even a former terror like John Lydon (who used to be called “Johnny Rotten” when he was the leader of infamous punk band the Sex Pistols) still makes records. He now appears regularly on TV chat shows in Britain, and was even a contestant on the reality show “I’m a Celebrity Get Me Out Of Here!”

It used to be said that pop music was an art form created by and for young people. Many groups or singers make one or two good records when they are in their early 20s, then disappear, or carry on making less interesting records. It was difficult to find artists who could continue making great records, year after year, for a long time. In some ways, this is still the case. The Rolling Stones, for example, are still much more famous for the songs they made in the 1960s and 70s than for their more recent recordings, and even though many people go and see Paul McCartney in concert, they are really hoping he will sing some old Beatles songs, rather than his new ones. People like to watch John Lydon on TV because they hope he will do something outrageous, like he used to do. Many of these rock ‘n’ roll grandads are really still living off the past.

This phenomenon is not limited to the West. In other parts of the world where there is more respect for older people and less of an emphasis on youth, perhaps it is to be expected. Last year, veteran Indian singer Asha Bhosle, now in her 70s, released a new record. She is a musician who has continued to develop, changing her style and working with other interesting western musicians such as Michael Stipe from the American rock band REM and classical musicians, the Kronos Quartet. However, it seems that at her concerts people still hope that she will sing the old Bollywood film songs such as “Dum Maaro Dum” that originally made her famous.

Pop only used to be for young people, now it has grown up. Now pop and rock music have been around for 50 years, people who started listening to it when they were young are now old. Why should their tastes change?

Of course, boy bands – groups of singing and dancing young people who are often not much older than the people who buy or download their songs – still continue to be hugely popular all over the world. However, it is very difficult to imagine a group like Blue still going in forty years time. And while older readers might remember the Backstreet Boys, or even Take That – how significant has their contribution to popular music really been? And can anyone already even remember McFly? Will anybody still be listening to Blue or Britney Spears when they’re in their sixties?

