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FEATURED

Joel Goldenberg: The greatest recyclers — the movie and music industries

By Joel Goldenberg --The Suburban Jan 15, 2016



Under Pressure was one of David Bowie's and Freddie Mercury of Queen's finest songs.

Before we get started on this week's theme, Retro Roundup marks the untimely passing of David Bowie, one of the most groundbreaking artists of the last 50 years.

I would love to declare myself an authority on Bowie, but I can't. I love the well-known songs like *Space Oddity*, *Changes* (especially), *Rebel Rebel*, *Life on Mars*, *Golden Years*, *Heroes*, *Fame*, *Under Pressure* (with Queen) and others. And I have listened to pretty much all of his notable albums. They just all never clicked with me genre-wise. Notwithstanding my personal tastes, his creativity and influence on other artists were boundless.

Monday was a real downer of a day. Music fans were literally crying as they heard the news. While he was 69, Bowie never seemed old, because he always sought to be cutting edge, even at the possible cost of lesser sales and occasional critical derision. That is a legacy in itself.

And now back to this week's theme:

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Each month, Côte St. Luc councillor Steven Erdelyi touts the city's progress in recycling, as opposed to disposal of waste in landfills. Great progress has indeed been made in Côte St. Luc, and other cities, I'm sure.

But when it comes to artistic recycling, the music and movie industries can't be beat.

Nowadays, "reboots" of films have become so prevalent that even reboots are being rebooted. How many Godzilla and Hulk movies have there been in the last 10 years? The Fantastic Four just got a do-over, as did Spiderman. We've had two sets of Batman movies, with a Batman vs. Superman faceoff coming soon. Superman has been redone over and over again on TV and in movies.

And the plundering of TV shows for TV reboots goes on, most not to my liking, most notably the new *Hawaii Five-O*, which is too cutesy, at least the episodes I saw. The original *Hawaii Five-O* cannot be bested — Jack Lord reigns supreme.

The Twilight Zone was rebooted twice on TV, and once as a movie.

I won't even go through the amount of TV shows that have been made into movies. The list is plentiful, and the practice continues.

Even movie poster designs are recycled on numerous occasions for different movies.

But in a Retro context, let's go back about a few decades. The mighty Columbia Pictures was not at all shy about recycling, and in the most blatant of ways.

The prime offence? The Three Stooges' shorts from 1934 to 1957. During the golden era when it was Moe, Larry and Curly, some shorts were remade with the same basic plots and some variations. Chief among these was *Hoi Polloi*, a 1935 entry in which two professors wager whether the three knuckleheads can be transformed into gentlemen. This was redone, to good effect, in 1946 with *Half Wits' Holiday* — tragically Curly Howard's last full short, as he suffered a stroke during filming.

At least the footage of the remake was all new.

But when Shemp Howard entered the scene, not only were shorts redone, many used stock footage from previous Shemp shorts, making for a frustrating viewing experience if you're watching in sequence on DVD. Even after Shemp suddenly died, there were still new shorts featuring him, mixing stock footage and new footage featuring "fake Shemp" — comic Emil Sitka either being filmed from the back or hiding his face, and speaking very little.

And lots of footage from the aforementioned *Half Wits' Holiday* was used for one of the Stooges' last shorts, *Pies and Guys* from 1959, featuring Shemp replacement Joe Besser, carefully editing out any sign of Curly. It was one of the trio's weakest entries because it suffered in comparison with its predecessors.

Columbia Pictures' tradition of recycling continued in the 1960s, this time through its television arm Screen Gems. The show *Bewitched*, about an attractive witch who marries a regular mortal, was fresh and funny, at least in its first few seasons starting in 1964. But by the end, in 1972, the show was getting stale, so much so that — guess what — previous plots were redone, to much lesser effect. By that time, Elizabeth Montgomery (Samantha) looked like she'd rather be anywhere else.

Recycling has happened in music, too. The backing track for the Angels' great hit *My Boyfriend's Back* was reused for the Chiffons' version. Riffs that Brian Wilson of the Beach Boys fooled around with in the 1960s and 1970s were used for many of his solo songs. In 1978, a Beach Boys album track, *Kona Coast*, reused most of the elements of the superior 1963 fun in the sun album track, *Hawaii* — which is so good it's played in concerts even now.

Elements of a 1964 Beach Boys discard, *All Dressed Up For School*, were used for a discard recorded in 1970, *I Just Got My Pay*. And different elements of *I Just Got My Pay* was used for a song that was released in 1972, *Marcella*.

When Kiss was short on material for their rush job third album, *Dressed to Kill*, they rearranged songs they recorded for their previous incarnation as Wicked Lester.

Even the Beatles took a 1963 reject, *One After 909*, and rocked it up for their 1970 *Let It Be* album.

And reggae producers have been known to use the same backing track numerous times, and not just for dub versions, which feature special musical effects.

Abba took a B-side — *Happy Hawaii* — and used the same melody for the album track *Why Did It Have To Be Me*.

And let's not get started on the recycling done without permission, the plagiarizing of songs; and at least for the first few years, sampling in rap songs without compensation to the original songwriter.

Some environmental group should give the entertainment industry a "century of achievement" prize.

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On a final note, in just the last few weeks, we've lost Bowie, Natalie Cole, Lemmy from Motorhead and music mogul Robert Stigwood — all giants in their own way.

Enough already.

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Joel Goldenberg: The greatest recyclers, The Beach Boys. Unreleased, 1964
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Joel Goldenberg: The greatest recyclers - The Beach Boys I Just Got My Pay
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