

MY WORD

HAIRDOS AND DON'TS

DAVID COHEN EXPLORES THE LINK BETWEEN MUSIC AND HAIR.

THE OTHER DAY as I was watching footage of The Allman Brothers Band in concert, it struck me that Gregg Allman's hairstyle looks exactly the same as it did in 1969. That's over four decades of dead straight, shoulder-length blond hair – a little less soft and silky perhaps, but many men Allman's age have no hair whatsoever, regardless of how it looked 45 years ago. So the astonishing thing is not so much that Gregg Allman has chosen to keep his hair that way, but that his hair has gone along with it.

If you examine the hairstyles of other rock legends of the 1960s and 1970s, you'll see many similar cases. The face carries on ageing, but the trademark hair is frozen – Dorian Gray-like – in time. The only concession it makes to the passing of the years is to turn grey and in some cases thin out a bit, but the length, the waviness, the curliness – the essential *hair-ness* of the hair in question – persists.

David Crosby is a case in point. His face has been ravaged by time and prolonged substance abuse, but the hairstyle he decided upon when he was in Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young has endured. It seems that Crosby took his own song 'Almost Cut My Hair' too literally, and has continued to almost cut his hair for over 40 years. The same applies to Robert Plant: the curly blond mop framing that wrinkled, sagging mug looks as robust as it did in Zeppelin's glory days. The Song Remains the Same? Absolutely – but so does the hair.

This fundamentalist approach cuts across all musical genres in which

white men predominate: folk, prog rock, psychedelia, metal, etc. Donovan, Tom Petty, Motorhead's Lemmy and Aerosmith's Steven Tyler have stuck to their respective hairstyles through thick and thin – but mostly thick. Even proto-punk legends like Iggy Pop are doing it; if anything, his hair is *longer* than it was when he was in The Stooges.

It's not just a question of good genes; otherwise most men over a certain age would be acting likewise. A chartered accountant of Brian Cadd's vintage might have both the desire and the ability to look like Brian Cadd, but he probably won't. Rock'n'roll, on the other hand, is one of the few professions that permits a 68-year-old man to go about the place with massive hair and not fear censure from the community at large. On the contrary, his refusal to bend to the dictates of fashion will often be applauded, particularly by other 68-year-old men.

Although this is essentially a male phenomenon, there are some notable female artists whose hairdos have consistently defied the trends. Ronnie Spector, perhaps best known for once being lead singer of The Ronettes, is 72 years old, but her voluminous "do" is a direct link back to the heyday of 1960s girl-groups. Bonnie Raitt still sports those cascading (dyed) red locks, and Chrissie Hynde's eyes remain hidden behind a thick, dark fringe.

Is there a difference in the way we perceive women who maintain a certain look well into an advanced age, and men who do the same? Perhaps. The fashion world may well regard Hynde's

do as iconic, whereas, say, Mick Jagger's hairstyle just makes him look like a bit of a tool.

All this raises the question: what about rockers who emerged in the late 1970s and later? Unlike their predecessors, many have wound up having no hair at all. Have you ever wondered why U2's The Edge always wears that beanie? The 1980s saw a dramatic increase in the use of hair product among male musicians, so that may be a contributing factor.

Indie bands from the 1980s and 90s have, I believe, been hardest hit by the problem of thinning hair. Michael Stipe, Frank Black, Billy Corgan: hugely influential, but somewhat bald. Why is it that Gen-X rockers struggle with this affliction, while their baby-boomer counterparts continue to thrive? Is there a link between writing depressing, angst-ridden songs and premature hair loss? Or is it just a question of using the right shampoo?

As for the stars in today's popular-music firmament, frankly, I'm too old to know who most of them are. There's the guy with the afro from Wolfmother, and that unkempt carrot-haired English singer – Ed Something. It's a little too early to predict how things will pan out for them, but I do note that Harry Styles is only 20 and his hairline already seems to be moving in one direction.

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