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This Strange Effect: Americana, Anglophilia, and The Kinks

Called the most English of the British Invasion bands, the Kinks were fascinated with and influenced by *Americana*. Their American fans likewise were and remain equally fascinated by the band’s *Englishness*. Each saw the other’s culture as ‘cooler’ than their own, an ‘otherness’ transformed by the superficialities of pop culture into something both exotic and sympathetic. This paper explores what accounts for this strange effect, that is, the symbiotic relationship between American Kinks’ fans love of the band’s English character, and the influence of America on the character the group (if not principle member Ray Davies). For its case studies, it examines several periods in Anglo-American cultural reception during the band’s history. These include the influence of American culture on the Davies’s formative years; early marketing of their band as ‘English;’ the effects of the band’s 1965-69 ban the United States; the Kinks’ American renaissance in the 1980s; the current image of the band in 21st century America.

Connective themes include communication between band and fans (limited, delayed, and expensive in the 1960s: ubiquitous, instant, and cheap in the 21st century) and signposts of cultural identity (What *defines* the Kinks’ ‘Englishness’ that Americans find so appealing? Why did (and do) English teenagers such as Ray Davies find so entrancing about the American character created by its popular culture?) Primary sources include social media, packaging and memorabilia, and data collected from a 2014-15 survey of about 200 American and British Kinks’ fans ranging across age, gender, education, and social & economic demographics. This examination of the Kinks’ relationship with their American audience complements current studies that examines the US-UK cultural symbiosis. Study of the equivocal ‘special relationship’ between the two countries has increased since WWII and is increasingly focused in recent years on popular culture, especially music (most recently by Kallioniemi and Kellett, amongst many others). It is a daunting if not fruitless task to try to establish some firm definition of English/American identity that explains the particular character that fascinates each side of the equation between the Kinks and their American fans. Instead, this paper will demonstrate that despite the ‘otherness’ of either culture, the relationship between the Kinks and their US supporters demonstrate common ground in terms of idealising the other’s authenticity, rebellion, and cool-factor.

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