

# David Bowie

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# Introduction

David Bowie has been creating musical works since the 60s. He has written some of rock and roll's greatest hits and will forever be known as one of the great composers of his time. Bowie was a trendsetter, a rule breaker, and a true artist. He will always be a major influence to many other great artists, and his works shall remain timeless. David Bowie was chosen for our project because of his great talent and influence on the world of music.

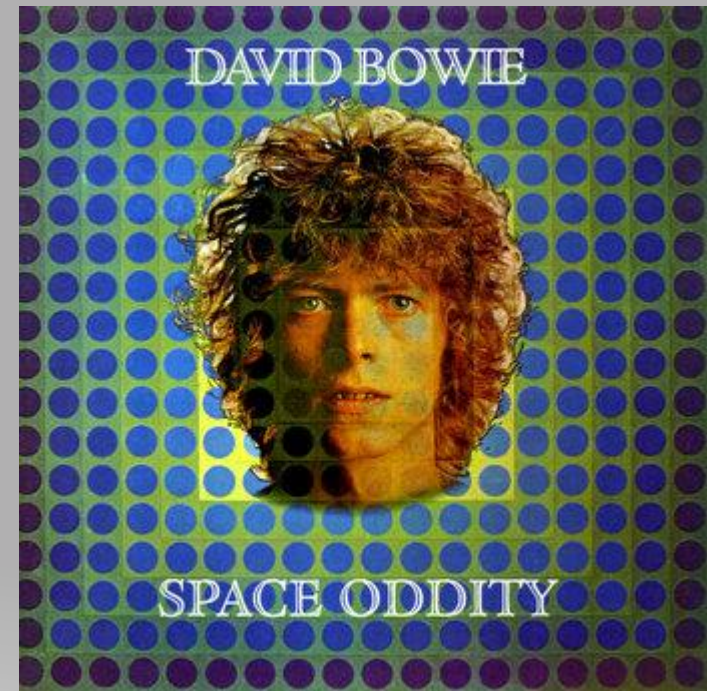
# Biography

- David Bowie was born David Robert Jones in Brixton, London, England on January 8th, 1947
- He Graduated from Bromley Technical High School at age 16
- Lead a musical Group "Davy Jones and the Lower Third"
- The group released singles, but not with the popularity Bowie had hoped for (David Bowie Biography, 2012)



# Biography

- David Bowie decided to change his last name to Bowie out of fear for being mistaken for Davy Jones of the Monkees. The name was inspired by the Bowie knife. (David Bowie Biography, 2012)
- Bowie decided to venture out on his own, but his first solo album was unsuccessful so he decided to take some time away from music.
- In 1967 he lived in a buddhist monastery in Scotland, and started a mime troupe in 1968. (David Bowie Biography, 2012)
- But by 1969, Bowie was back in the music scene. He signed with Mercury Records and recorded the single "Space Oddity." The song was released in 1972 in the U.S. and was number 15 on the charts. (David Bowie Biography, 2012)



# Biography

- He released the album *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders From Mars* in 1972, first in the UK, then in The U.S. months later and quickly became a superstar. (The Ziggy Stardust Companion, 2012)
- He dressed in wild costumes and portrayed the character of the



- unfortunate rockstar "Ziggy Stardust."
- Bowie quickly dropped the Ziggy Stardust act and began to produce albums for Lou Reed and Iggy Pop. (David Bowie Biography, 2012)
- In 1973 he disbanded the Spiders from Mars and announced he was finished doing live shows.



# Biography

After dropping the Ziggy Stardust act, He released *David Live* in 1974 and *Young Americans* in 1975.



The album *Young Americans* included the song "Fame."

John Lennon was credited as a co-writer in the song "Fame" because Bowie felt that Lennon gave him the inspiration through conversations on the subject of fame. (ASCAP Songwriters #1s Throughout The Years, 2012)

# Biography

- In 1983, David Bowie signed a new contract with RCA and recorded the album *Let's Dance* which included "Modern Love," "China Girl," and features guitar work by Stevie Ray Vaughan. (David Bowie Biography, 2012)
- Bowie has also starred in many films such as *The Man Who Fell To Earth*, *The Elephant Man*, and *Labyrinth*.
- Bowie is still composing music and even helped Scarlett Johansson compose a Tom Waits cover album. (David Bowie Biography, 2012)
- David Bowie received the Grammy Lifetime achievement award in 2006. (David Bowie Biography, 2012)



# Musical Style



- Bowie was highly interested in show business and theatre
- He was heavily influenced by British musical singer-songwriter and actor, Anthony Newley (David Bowie, 2012)
- Adopted his vocal style which was most noted on *David Bowie*
- Theatrics became important in stage performance



# Musical Style

- David Bowie played a significant amount of instruments which gave him an extraordinary talent both technically and vocally
- He has recorded a number of songs that fit into a variety of musical styles. Bowie has been referred to as the leader of glitter rock in the 1970's, and at certain points in his career he tried being a folk singer, a pop artist, and participated in various rock bands.

## **Instruments Include:**

- Guitar
- Saxophone
- Alto
- Piano
- Mellotron
- Harmonica
- Drums & percussion
- Viola & Cello
- Xylophone

# Musical Style Character:

## Ziggy Stardust

- *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars* introduced Ziggy Stardust (Murray, 2012)
- Was his flamboyant, androgynous alter ego
- Re-emerged as this character in 1972
- Wore striking costumes and died his hair red



# Musical Style Character:

## Thin White Duke

- Fictional character that went with the album, *Station to Station*
- Extension of Thomas Jerome Newton, whom he portrayed in a film
- Wardrobe included white shirt, black pants and vest, combed back hair
- Distant and cold charisma



# Key Musical Style

- Octave switches in different repetitions of the same melody
- Pitch singing to particular effects
- Dramatic voice changes from section to section (David Bowie Biography, 2012)



# Musical Style: Importance in Rock and Roll

- Pioneer of glam rock
- Brought new dimension to popular
- Musicologist James Perone credits Bowie as “having brought sophistication to rock music” (Jepai, 2012)
- Thome Forget stated “It is almost impossible to find a popular artist today that has not been influenced by David Bowie” (Jepai, 2012)
- Challenged core belief of what rock music was
- Bowie’s record company produced a slogan for him
  - “There is old wave, there is new wave, and there is Bowie”





# Who Influenced David Bowie?

His first introduction to instrumentation was learning the saxophone at age 13  
(*David Bowie, 2012*)

## **Marc Bolan and T. Rex**

- Bolan introduced Bowie to glam-rock, a genre on the rise in the late 1960s and early 1970s
- Bowie performed mime at Bolan's concerts and Bolan played guitar with him on songs "The Prettiest Star" and "Karma Man" (*David Bowie, 2012*)



*Marc Bolan*



# Who Influenced David Bowie?

Bowie's lyrics and music had specific methods or history

- "All the Madmen," inspired by Bowie's institutionalized brother, Terry. (*David Bowie*, 2012)
- **William Burrough's "cut-up technique"**
  - Cut up pages of words, maybe from a newspaper, then you mix the words up then put them together to see what word patterns you have



*David Bowie*

# Collaborative Influences

David Bowie was influenced by artists he initially influenced and those he collaborated with like Brian Eno

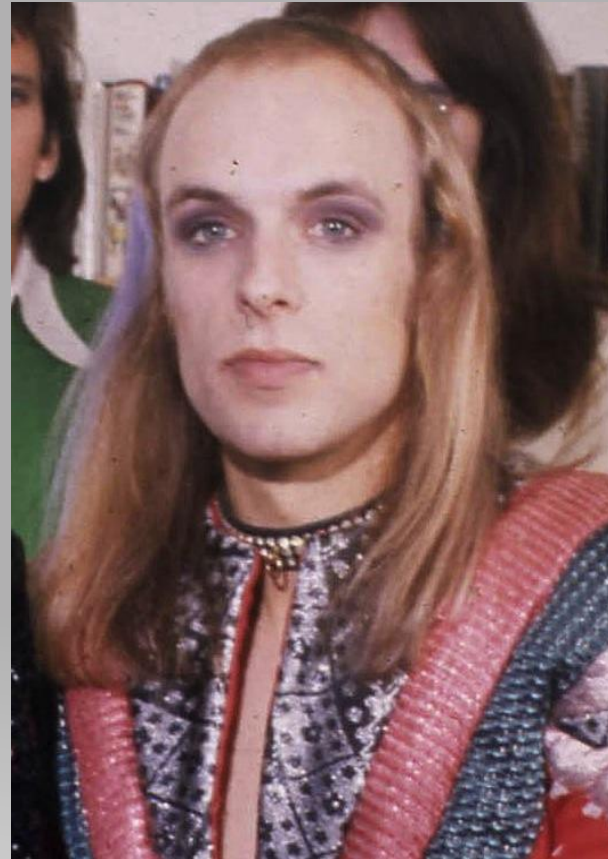
Bowie's work with Eno included songs such as:

*"Low"* (Number 11, 1977),

*"Heroes"* (Number 35, 1977)

*Lodger* (Number 20, 1979)

- These songs were known for their unique make-up including avant-garde electronic music and the "cut-up" technique (David Bowie, 2012)



*Brian Eno*

# Musically Influenced: Madonna

*"Before I saw David Bowie live, I was just your normal, dysfunctional, rebellious teenager from the Midwest, and he has truly changed my life." -Madonna*

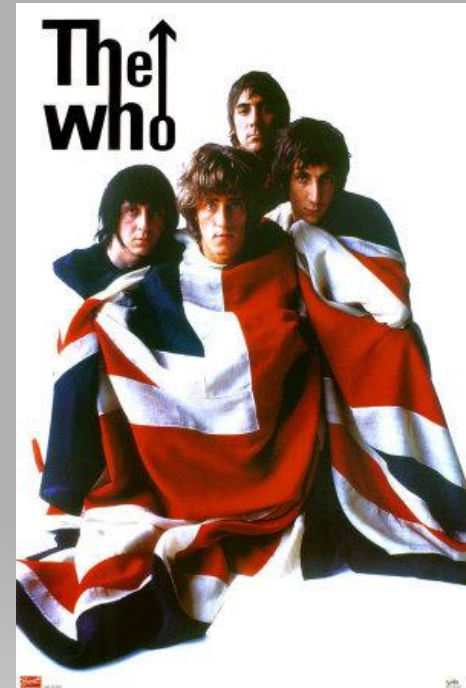
(Rock 'N Roll Hall of Fame, 2010)



- influenced Madonna's push for experimentation in lyrics, music, and performance especially related to themes like sexuality

# Musical Contemporaries

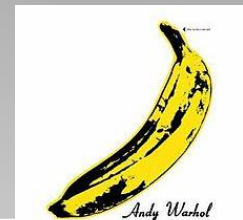
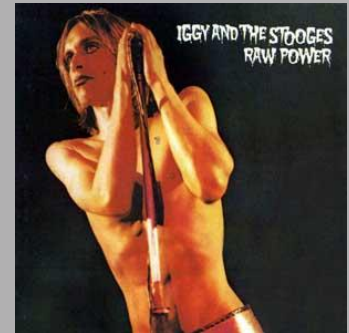
- From Elvis, who brought a sex-packed set of swaying hips, to the Beatles who brought the craze, to the Led that who brought the metal, all of it set the stage for Bowie's outrageously brilliant four-decade long musical contributions
- Rock and Roll was in a stage of evolution, as it seemed every up and coming artist was seeking to break into a new frontier, Bowie was something else
- Contemporaries:
  - The Who
  - Led Zeppelin
  - Bob Dylan
  - Velvet Underground
  - Elvis Presley
  - Stevie Ray Vaughn
  - Iggy Pop
  - Jimi Hendrix
  - Janice Joplin



# Musical/Historical Contemporaries

## Cont.

- Iggy Pop & The Stooges - out there and over the top, "No one liked Iggy and the Stooges unless you were crossdressing or on some sort of drugs, or had dropped out of high school or life" - Iggy Pop, Direct influence on the character of Ziggy Stardust, contributed to his persona, wanted to emulate
- (*David Bowie: Sound and Vision Documentary*)
- Lou Reed & The Velvet Underground - pulled no punches about lyrical exploration, talked drugs, crossdressing, unconventional sex, social unrest, had a heavy influence on Bowie's own songwriting (*David Bowie: Sound and Vision Documentary*)
- Andy Warhol - Bowie was fascinated by the artist's approach, Artist's Consortium, fascinated by his Avant-Garde and revolutionary approach to Art





# The Formation of Ziggy Stardust

"Ziggy really set the pattern for my future work. Ziggy was my Martian messiah who twanged a guitar. He was a simplistic character. Someone who was dropped down here, got brought down to our way of thinking and ended up destroying himself." - Bowie (The Ziggy Stardust Companion)

## **Ziggy**

- Meant to be the 'ultimate pop icon,' mix of the sound of Lou Reed and the enigmatic presence of Iggy Pop
- Also built on the name of a Tailor's Shop he saw riding a train one day (Ziggy's) as well as the British Model Twiggy with whom he appeared on the cover of Pinups with

## **Stardust**

- Comes from Norman Carl Odom's stage name of "The legendary stardust cowboy" - was on the Mercury Label with Bowie in 1969

## **Ziggy Stardust**

- Also pulled heavily from the wild and crazy Vince Taylor
- Came from Bowie's desire to write a theatrical, musical piece of work



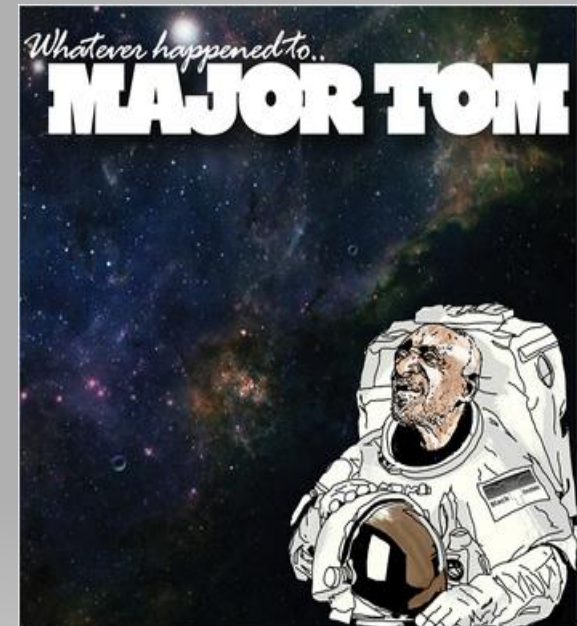
# Historical Background

- - Bowie's musical contributions have spanned four decades, but central to the development of his early popular music was the backdrop of the sixties and seventies
- - Vietnam War: loss of young American lives for a seemingly pointless and endless War
- - Development of East - West, Capitalistic - Communist, tensions across the globe
- - Commitment to country vs. Disillusionment of the same country firing on its own citizens (Kent State Shootings)
- - Freedom of thought, love, and expression meets the reality of a rapidly developing capitalistic nation
- - Every time period is rich in material, but perhaps what is notable is the rapidity of the changing American identity which heavily influenced Bowie artistic endeavors



# Historical Background Cont.

- Perhaps the most interesting of historical influences was intentional release of 'Space Oddity' to coincide with the first moon landing (*Telegraph*, Moon Music 2011)
- Landing on the moon represented one of man's greatest achievements, and now a future full of limitless possibilities provided a great lyrical base
- This was contrasted by a fear of man's potential, and his role in space
- Use of Major Tom as a fictional character caught off guard by the loneliness of a silent space (*Telegraph*, Moon Music 2011)
- Space Race as a fuel for developing East-West tensions around the world
- Major Tom was written by Bowie after seeing Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* while "stoned out of his mind." (David Bowie Biography 2012)



# Trent Reznor (Nine Inch Nails)

*"One of my biggest heroes and people I was fortunate enough to be around is David Bowie. I look at his career, and he always had the balls to break things that weren't broken, to step away from something and try something new, at risk of failing." -Trent Reznor (Ryan, 2009)*



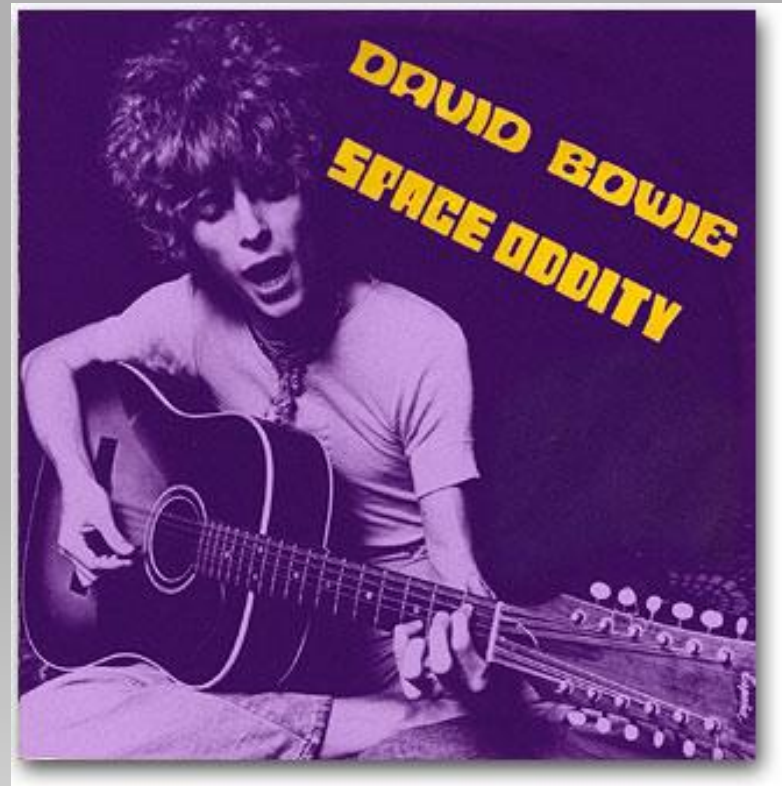
- David Bowie's vast experience in dabbling in numerous musical genres allowed for Reznor to experiment within the wide rock spectrum including Industrial.
- Bowie's changes in vocals helped pave the way for Trent to experiment with dynamics ranging from songs that turn from whispers to screams

# Musical Analysis- "Space Oddity"

## Song Background

Our group agreed that before analyzing the musical elements of this song, that it would be beneficial to provide a bit of background of the single "Space Oddity" as well. As mentioned in his biography earlier in the presentation, it was recorded in 1969. Once released in 1972 it was a hit in both the U.K. and America. The song appears on the album *David Bowie*. Space Oddity was released at the time of the moon landing, and was used by the BBC in their coverage of the event making it famous. This was despite the fact that, in reality, the lyrics had to do with an astronaut lost in space. Here is a link to the song: (David Bowie Biography, 2012)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uhSYbRiYwTY>





# Musical Analysis- "Space Oddity"

## Instrumentation

We noticed an integration of vocals, both electric and acoustic guitar, drums, handclapping, violin, and bass. However most notably is the use of an instrument innovative of its time and one that many may not recognize. We are referring to the use of the Stylophone.

"The Stylophone's an odd duck of an instrument. Long before the iPhone's numerous instrument apps came along, Brian Jarvis created this pocket-sized synthesizer in 1967. The Stylophone player makes music by touching a pen-shaped stylus to the small keyboard, a voltage-controlled oscillator sounding a note each time. Countless musical instruments are invented each year and almost all remain in obscurity. But this strange and not-particularly-pleasant-sounding device found its way onto an international hit within two years, when Bowie recorded "Space Oddity"."

(Weir, 2011)

Here is a link to a video that demonstrates the use of the stylophone. After watching this, it is easier to find its existence throughout the song.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?>



# Musical Analysis- "Space Oddity"

## **Meter and Beat subdivision,**

The song begins with a quadruple meter format, and the drum rolling provides a complex beat subdivision. After the spoken countdown (roughly 1:20 into the video), quadruple meter remains and the drums accent beats 2 and 4 giving the song a strong backbeat and there's a duple beat subdivision. At the 2:05 mark the song transitions into another complex beat subdivision. At 2:25 when we hear only Bowie's guitar, the offbeat of beat three and beat four are accompanied with claps for emphasis. This only lasts for two measures, however, before moving into another beat subdivision that is complicated and hard to identify. The remainder of the song is a trade-off between these variations.





# Musical Analysis- "Space Oddity"

## Texture

The song begins with a tradeoff between an acoustic guitar and the stylophone for a monophonic beginning. Vocals soon come in to support a new guitar rhythm for a homophonic melody and accompaniment texture. After the spoken countdown, polyphonic nonimitative texture makes its way in as the majority of the instruments that exist throughout the song feed off each other. Eventually guitar is on its own with the exception of occasional claps creating a brief two measures of monophonic texture. "Space Oddity" consists of a tradeoff between these textures.



# Musical Analysis- "Space Oddity"

## Form

1. Ground control to major Tom  
Ground control to major Tom  
Take your protein pills and put your helmet on  
(Ten) Ground control (Nine) to major Tom (Eight)  
(Seven, six) Commencing countdown (Five), engines on (Four)  
(Three, two) Check ignition (One) and may gods (Blastoff) love be with you

2. This is ground control to major Tom, you've really made the grade  
And the papers want to know whose shirts you wear  
Now it's time to leave the capsule if you dare  
[ Lyrics from: [http://www.lyricsfreak.com/d/david+bowie/space+oddity\\_20036711.html](http://www.lyricsfreak.com/d/david+bowie/space+oddity_20036711.html) ]

3. This is major Tom to ground control, I'm stepping through the door  
And I'm floating in a most peculiar way  
And the stars look very different today  
Here am I sitting in a tin can far above the world  
Planet Earth is blue and there's nothing I can do

4. Though I'm past one hundred thousand miles, I'm feeling very still  
And I think my spaceship knows which way to go  
Tell my wife I love her very much, she knows  
Ground control to major Tom, your circuits dead, there's something wrong  
Can you hear me, major Tom?  
Can you hear me, major Tom?  
Can you hear me, major Tom?  
Can you...  
Here am I sitting in my tin can far above the Moon  
Planet Earth is blue and there's nothing I can do.



The lyrics to the left are difficult to read but having them there should make it easier for one to understand where we are referencing when we label micro and macrostructure forms.

## Microstructure

Verse one: AAB, AAB,

Verse two: ABB,

Verse three: ABB, ABC

Instrumentals

Verse four: ABB, ABB, ABC, ABC

## Macrostructure

If we're use the lyrics on the left as our template for dividing verses, then due to the fact that all are different from each other in some way, the form for the overall song is ABCD.

# Conclusion

David Bowie's unique talent made him an icon in popular music. He was fearless in his approach to music, art, fashion, sex, and all things rock and roll. He revolutionized the genre by pushing the boundaries, battled social prejudice, personal tragedy, and like many artists, a drug problem, but in the process he produced a sound that is distinctly his own. The key to his success? A never-ending desire for change, on the most epic of scales. His influence has spanned decades, and is still being felt across genres today.



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