

# INTERNATIONAL FAUST STUDIES

*Adaptation, Reception, Translation*

C O N T I N U U M   R E C E P T I O N   S T U D I E S

*Edited by*  
LORNA FITZSIMMONS



# 12 They Sold Their Soul for Rock'n'Roll: Faustian Rock Musicals\*

---

Paul M. Malone

From its birth, rock had a reputation as 'the devil's music'. The old blues musicians, the rockers' forerunners, had reveled in and contributed to this reputation: Robert Johnson, for example, sang the Faustian tall tale of selling his soul for musical prowess at the 'Crossroads' (Lipsitz 1997: 47). But the blues had also been demonized by its critics, often white observers disturbed by what they saw as a 'black' form of entertainment laden with dangerous sexuality (Maddock 1996: 183; Tucker 1989: 289–90). When white musicians began taking up a form of upbeat blues, fear of racist backlash impelled promoters to avoid the established term 'rhythm and blues', which was tied to black culture; in its place the label 'rock and roll', a little-known euphemism for sexual intercourse, became current (Barnard 1986: 11–12; Szatmary 1991: 21–2). Not surprisingly, the newborn musical form remained as suspect as its precursor. As a result, few rock artists of the first generation dared lay claim to demonic associations: the first great white rocker, Elvis Presley, undercut criticism of his racially and sexually loaded performance style by cultivating a reassuringly conservative private image, singing Gospel songs and willingly accepting the draft (Sullivan 1987: 316; Tucker 1989: 292–3).

The next generation was less circumspect. In the 1960s, for instance, Mick Jagger's devilish swagger in 'Sympathy for the Devil' and the Rolling Stones' corresponding image as 'Their Satanic Majesties' came close to following Robert Johnson's example (Wells 1983: 22–3), but their provocative posing never drew the furor unintentionally aroused by John Lennon when he remarked in 1966 that the relatively innocuous Beatles were 'bigger than Jesus' (Sullivan 1987: 315–6); and the Stones' pretensions to evil were shattered by their helplessness when violence broke out at the 1969 Altamont festival. Between these two dates lay the birth of heavy metal rock, which would update Johnson's basic blues with a mixture of extreme volume and, often, 'outright Satanism' (Hinds 1992: 156).

Common as the devilish undercurrents of rock music have been, however, and despite the frequency with which the devil has popped up in rock songs,

---

\* I would like to thank Osman Durrani, David G. John and Bernd Mahl for giving me access to various materials in the course of researching the current chapter.



whether as protagonist, antagonist, prop or mere metaphor for hard times, it has been uncommon for rock music to make any concrete, explicit reference to the Faust theme specifically. The following study describes in brief four exceptions to this generalization.

These examples, all musicals rather than single songs, have been chosen on the basis of two criteria: first, because they contain three elements key to the Faust plot as configured by Goethe—namely, a Faust figure, a Mephistopheles figure and a Gretchen figure (the last a Goethean innovation); and second, because they all by some means set these elements within a rock music environment: the protagonist, so to speak, sells his soul for rock'n'roll. This criterion has eliminated a work that might otherwise be given pride of place in such a study, namely, the Austrian *Fäustling: Spiel in G* (*Fäustling: Play in G*). *Fäustling* was produced for the Vienna Festival of 1973, with text and direction by Josef Prokopets and music by Wolfgang Ambros (Mahl 2005: 206). As the diminutive form of the title indicates, the work shrinks the characters of Goethe's play to fit contemporary Vienna: civil servant Heinrich Fäustling, bored with his middle-class life, is introduced by the devil (a figure as much from the 'underground' as the underworld) to a looser, more hedonistic lifestyle. As a result, Fäustling feels more alive, even forgetting his infatuation with his secretary Grete; but in the end he is no more certain that he is happy.

Composer Ambros would go on to become the father of 'Austropop' (Larkey 1992: 158), a localized manifestation of the 'Liedermacher' (literally, 'song maker') or 'New Song' movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s. The 'Liedermacher' grafted social consciousness and Anglo-American rock tropes onto French-style 'chansons' to create a modern indigenous German-language popular music scene to rival imported rock (Schmidt 1979: 145–6). Austropop sought to use the same methods to counter not only Anglophone, but also (West) German, cultural hegemony (Larkey 1992: 153–4), particularly through its programmatic use of local Austrian dialects rather than Standard German (164–5). *Fäustling*, for example, is likewise characterized by its use of strong Viennese dialect: Ambros, as the devil, proclaims, 'I'm the devil and I say, "No!"' ('I bin da Teife und i sog, "Na!'"'), *Fäustling's* version of Goethe's 'I am the spirit that denies forever!' ('Ich bin der Geist der stets verneint') (F, 1338).<sup>1</sup>

Despite *Fäustling's* initial success, the script was never published and the original 1973 vinyl cast album has never been reissued. Moreover, although the cover notes to the album boast of the use of the 'progressive pop music' idiom—the music ranges from orchestral to folk-tinged rock—they avoid the use of the word 'rock', and music itself plays no role in the plot, which remains firmly in a 'petit-bourgeois' milieu.

If *Fäustling* is eliminated, the pioneering work in this field is Brian De Palma's 1974 horror-comedy film *The Phantom of the Paradise*, with songs by actor turned singer-songwriter Paul Williams. Essentially a retelling of Gaston Leroux's *The Phantom of the Opera*, De Palma's script also includes elements of both Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *Faust*. The last-named story, however, is the only influence explicitly referred to in the dialogue.

*Phantom's* protagonist is Winslow Leach, composer of a 'pop cantata' entitled *Faust* (the original *Phantom of the Opera's* composition was called *Don Juan Triumphant*, but Faust and Don Juan have regularly been linked as thematically related figures). Leach tries out his material between acts at a rock club; early in



the film he performs the title ballad, 'Faust', with its agitated rolling piano ostinato. Although the plot of Leach's cantata never becomes clear, the sentiments expressed might not be out of place in Faust's reveries in Gretchen's bedchamber (F, 2687–728): complaining of being miscast as a 'cryin' clown', Leach as Faust sings that he would sell his soul for one true love, in a fantasy of endless happiness and laughter (Williams 1998).

As luck would have it, the club where Leach is playing is owned by the reclusive record mogul Swan, who is in attendance. Impressed, Swan sends his lackey Philbin to obtain more of Leach's music, but Leach explains that he cannot hand over just a couple of upbeat excerpts, since the work is an organic whole telling the Faust story. The philistine Philbin has never heard of Faust, of course, and can only ask what label he is on. Leach's pedantic reply describing the historical/legendary Faust selling the devil his soul for 'worldly experience and power' fails to impress Philbin (*Phantom* 2003).

Appalled, Leach insists that his 'magnum opus' must be performed in its entirety, by Leach himself; otherwise he refuses to do business. Swan, however, is looking for fodder for his stable of acts to open his new concert venue, the Paradise. Philbin steals Leach's music and Swan frames the composer for drug pushing, ensuring that he is sentenced to life in prison. There Leach hears a mutilated version of 'Faust' on the radio, covered by one of Swan's bands, the Beach Bums: his ballad has become a surf-rock song about street racing. Enraged, the composer breaks prison and tries to destroy the albums at Swan's Death Records pressing plant, but he falls into a record press and is scarred horribly, his face and voice destroyed.

Soon, the Paradise is being haunted by a masked madman determined to prevent *Faust* from being staged. Swan quickly realizes that the Phantom is Leach; he also discovers the Phantom's weakness, when a young woman named Phoenix auditions with an organ- and guitar-based rhythm and blues song, 'Special to Me', fitting the Gretchen character's failure to understand Faust and his motivation (the singer sees the addressee as senselessly spellbound by ambition), even ending with a 'Gretchen question' (F, 3414–68): despite her love, Phoenix doesn't see where the lovers will go once they 'arrive' at success (Williams 1998).

Leach had fallen in love with Phoenix before his incarceration; now he cannot terrorize her as he has previous performers. Swan offers Leach a production of *Faust* with Phoenix in the lead as his 'voice', if Leach will rewrite the cantata for her—and sell Swan his soul. Leach agrees, and feverishly revises his work in a montage set to 'The Phantom's Theme', describing the famous Faustian inner conflict ('Two souls, alas, dwell in my breast' ['Zwei Seelen wohnen, ach! in meiner Brust'] [F, 1112]) as a tale in which 'All the devils that disturbed me and the angels that defeated them somehow' are bid to unite in the singer (in a distant, rather coy echo of the Beatles' 'Come Together') (Williams 1998).

Once Leach's work is done, however, Swan attempts to seal him up alive in his workroom, relegates Phoenix to backup vocals and casts the effeminate glam-rock star Beef in the lead. When Leach escapes and kills Beef onstage, Phoenix quells the crowd with the ballad 'Old Souls' and becomes a star herself—something she wants so badly that she will even sleep with Swan to keep it. In despair, Leach tries to kill himself, but his body refuses to die; it seems his contract, and thus his life, 'terminate with Swan'. An attempt on Swan's life proves equally fruitless, since, as the impresario explains, he is similarly 'under contract'.



Swan now plans to conclude 'his' *Faust* by marrying Phoenix on live television; but Leach discovers Swan's cache of surveillance videotapes, including a reel from 1953 that shows Swan selling his soul to the devil for eternal youth: now only Swan's video image ages. Leach also learns that Swan plans to have Phoenix killed during the wedding ceremony as a publicity stunt. Setting the video room alight, Leach rushes to the Paradise, foils the murder and rips off Swan's mask to reveal his true, aged visage. As the crowd carries off the dying Swan, Leach too expires, unmasked and horribly scarred, but redeemed in Phoenix's arms.

The song best suited to expressing the devil's cynical attitude, 'The Hell of It', with its heavy bass intro riff and boogie-flavored chorus, is displaced out of the plot and plays under the closing credits. Originally, the song had been written to be played as a back-handed 'tribute' at Beef's funeral, but this scene was never filmed (De Palma 2003: 22); as a closing title theme, 'The Hell of It' now seems to paraphrase Mephisto's pessimistic summary of human existence itself (*F*, 279–92): life is a game rigged against you and time is nothing more than a cheat, Williams sings as an omniscient narrator to the departed (who now, at film's end, seems more likely to be Swan and/or Leach than Beef). The 'hell of it' mentioned in the title and chorus is the fact that even this empty life is wasted by humanity, and particularly by the worthless addressee, whose demise is unmourned and whose damnation is certain (Williams 1998).

*Phantom of the Paradise* successfully satirizes both rock opera and theatrical rock of the era, but its melange of elements from several sources finally devolves into chaos rather than building to a climax. Perhaps the film's most interesting aspect is its warped reinterpretation of the 'double wager', another Goethean innovation to the Faust story. Although there is no wager between God and the devil in *Phantom*, there are two devilish pacts: on the one hand, Swan acts as Mephistopheles to Leach's Faust, but we later discover that this recapitulates the original contract between Swan and the devil himself. This doubling is made even more resonant by the fact that Swan, plagiarist of Leach's compositions, is played by Paul Williams, the songs' actual composer; and the devil appears to Swan as his own reflection—Williams again. This joke is underlined when Swan uses his knowledge of recording technology to restore Leach's destroyed voice temporarily, allowing Leach to perform the ballad 'Faust' again—this time with Paul Williams' singing voice. Although Williams had supposedly originally wanted to play the Phantom, identifying with 'the sensitive artist who has had his music commercialized to the point of its being unrecognizable to him but is, of course, fabulously successful by it' (De Palma 2003: 18), he is a more interesting choice as Swan. The diminutive Williams is well over a foot shorter than William Finley, the actor playing Leach, and even shorter than Jessica Harper, who plays Phoenix; with his teddy-bear face, long blond hair and adolescent voice, his childlike androgyny makes his ruthlessness even more disturbing.

Unfortunately, most of the film is less clever, with the exception of Williams' own witty songs, which stray well beyond his usual mild rhythm-and-blues musical style; although *Phantom* earned an Oscar nomination for its music, Williams would have greater success as composer of children's songs for *The Muppet Movie* (1979) and several of its sequels. As for the film itself, although *Phantom of the Paradise* eventually garnered a small cult following, at the time it was a critical and commercial failure (De Palma 2003: 43–4).



Nine years later, the Canadian stage musical *Starboy*, written by Randall Paris Dark, with additional lyrics by Cary Dark and music by Ian Crowley, was first produced in Calgary at the Loose Moose Theatre in 1983. The unpaginated published playscript describes *Starboy* as 'a fantasy based on the Faust tale of selling one's soul to achieve one's goal' (Dark 1983). The Mephistopheles role here is displaced onto the devil's daughter Satina, who introduces herself, and invites the listener to 'burn', in the play's opening number, 'My Place is Hot'. As the heavy dance beat proclaims, the portion of hell under Satina's sway is obviously a kind of disco inferno, where 'you won't be the first and you won't be the last' to end up (Dark et al. 1984) (compare Mephistopheles' remark to Faust, after the 'Walpurgis Night's Dream' ['Walpurgisnachtstraum'], that Gretchen 'is not the first' to 'perish without help and without hope' ['Sie ist die erste nicht'; 'lässet sie hülflos verderben'] [*F*, 'Trüber Tag—Feld' 12–13]). Satina is saddled with two incompetent assistants, the bubble-headed Rita and her bisexual brother Lucius. Rita, sent scouting for prospects, comes upon the hero, Jimmy Paul Beadley, reading *Rolling Stone* in his bedroom and wishing that he could become a rock star, not merely singing for huge audiences, but actually fronting for no less than the Rolling Stones. He sings 'Rock Star', a power ballad with overtones of the 1980s bands Styx and Toto in its music-box piano introduction, and faint echoes of Faust's craving for 'corrosive joy and dissipation' (*F*, 1766): Jimmy wants to be like his idols, traveling the world and leading a life of debauchery, a goal for which he is prepared even to deal with the devil, though apparently not to work hard, practice an instrument and pay his dues on the road. From outside, Rita asks if this means he would be willing to sell his soul, to which Jimmy replies that he would indeed go that far (Dark et al. 1984).

This is an implicit invitation that Jimmy does not need to utter three times. Seizing the opportunity once the song ends, Rita enters through the window and offers Jimmy the fulfillment of his desires in return for his soul; since he believes that she is no more than a dream, he ultimately agrees only to get rid of her. As Rita exits, Jimmy's girlfriend Christine enters; she wants him to quit living on unemployment insurance ('UIC') and find a job, so that they can get married. Jimmy wants to make her happy, but he also wants to live out his fantasy, and his conflict is sung out in the show-tune style duet 'Get a Job', another example of the Gretchen and Faust characters' failure to communicate on the same level (*F*, 3414–68). In this case, Christine, rather than Jimmy, seems the wiser and more practical partner. Christine offers Jimmy work at her father's car wash, which would allow them to marry and set up house in a condominium; her dreams of broadloom carpet, a linoleum kitchen and hall mirrors are contrasted with Jimmy's preference for mirrors in the bedroom and obvious disinterest in raising a family, given his sarcastic response to her suggestion of raising children.

Exasperated, Christine finally avers that there is no power on earth that can make Jimmy a rock star. By this point, however, there are two opposing unearthly forces at work on Jimmy's behalf: in heaven, gay fairy godfather Burt and his handsome son Steen have picked Jimmy's name at random to help him. Meanwhile, Rita has communicated Jimmy's agreement to Satina, who—since she only collects female souls—is willing to grant Jimmy's wish in return for Christine's soul as well. She has no intention of telling him the real price, of



course, until it is too late. Satina brings a contract to earth and gets Jimmy's signature, tempting him via the duet 'Star Boy' [sic]; he will open his own rock show the very next evening in Las Vegas. Christine enters just as the contract is signed—sealed with a kiss—and jumps to the wrong conclusion; she immediately leaves him, singing her feelings of betrayal in the ballad 'Hollow at the Heart', a watered-down echo of Gretchen's sentiments before the shrine of the Mater Dolorosa ('How they rage/Deep in my marrow,/The pangs of my heart!' [F, 3596–8]). The bluesy sound of the saxophone and piano comes to the fore as Christine laments remaining for so long with Jimmy to no purpose but to be left with the feeling of hollowness described in the song's title (Dark et al. 1984).

Satina now informs Jimmy that he owes her Christine's soul, to be paid by burning a lock of her hair at midnight; his stardom will cost him all of his human relationships, for he will become vain and self-obsessed as Satina's first victim did, described in the song 'Sacrifice'. Jimmy and Christine reconcile, however, and with Burt and Steen's aid, outwit the devil's daughter. The lock of hair Satina burns turns out to come from one of Burt's wigs, and the contract is thus void. Jimmy can now defeat Satina by means of the power ballad 'Flashing Lights'. To add further insult, Satina loses both of her assistants, since Steen and Rita have fallen in love and Lucius pairs off with Burt. Satina disappears, swearing revenge; but Jimmy still gets his rock show, thanks to Burt and Steen—because he believed in himself and because he expresses proper remorse in the song 'Lost and Confused'—and at the end of the final number, the doo-wop inflected 'After the Battle', he and Christine fly up, apparently to heaven, on a glittering Las Vegas-style star (Dark 1983).

By contrast with *Phantom of the Paradise*, in *Starboy* the hero not only survives, but also gets to keep both his love and the goal for which he was willing to sell his soul in the first place. Moreover, there is another interesting revision of the double wager, since Satina is willing to purchase Jimmy's soul only if he will also sign away Christine's—though once again these are pacts, rather than bets. Despite some strong arrangements of the songs, however, which vary in style from Broadway through lounge and reggae to synthesizer-laden rock (complete with Eddie Van Halen-style guitar solos), the simplistic level of the plot, and particularly of its comic elements, reduce *Starboy* to a mediocre situation comedy: the script's mawkish handling of Burt's homosexuality and transvestitism, for example, has aged far more badly than the music.

More than another decade later, in 1995, *Randy Newman's Faust* appeared as an album. Like Paul Williams, Newman was originally a songwriter who had taken to recording his own material; the classically trained intellectual Newman, however, had seldom been hit-parade material. His dark and caustically witty songs, set to music less influenced by rock than by a combination of barbershop, gospel/blues, nineteenth- and early twentieth-century popular parlor music and Hollywood film scores (Winkler 1988), tend to be 'dramatic monologues' akin to Victorian poetry, featuring "“reprehensible” (grotesque) narrators" (Dunne 1992: 53–4). Moreover, Newman as performer totally subsumes himself into his narrators: 'no matter how depraved Newman's characters are, they are portrayed without condescension, and often with outright affection—the songs seem to ask, “are you and I really any better?”' (Winkler 1988: 24). Newman's version of *Faust*, however, does not necessarily display the same affection for its



model: '... there's something so wise about [Goethe's *Faust*] that it made me want to try to destroy it, in a way ... and have all its wisdom frustrated by the nature of *real* human beings' (Willman 2003: iv).

Where God seems to be completely absent in *Phantom* and works only through intermediaries in *Starboy*, he appears in person at the very top of Newman's *Faust*, as the angels back him up in a gospel number, 'Glory Train'. Their jubilation is dampened—and straight 4/4 time changes to jagged 7/8 (Lucchesi 2003: 113)—when Lucifer interrupts to point out loudly that neither God nor he himself actually exists, as they were both only invented by superstitious fools (Newman 2003a).

Newman's rude interruption here updates Boito's famous whistle aria in *Mefistofele*, while the scene as a whole mimics much of Goethe's 'Prologue in Heaven' ('Prolog im Himmel') (*F*, 243–98). As Kevin Courrier points out, however, 'Since the musical is built on the assumption that God and the Devil *do* indeed exist, Newman's claims that they are figments of our imagination [are] incongruous, and the Devil's barbed points have no sting' (2005: 273).

As a parody, Newman's *Faust* parallels Goethe's basic plot and character constellation; however, Newman substantially alters the protagonist. His Henry Faust is no wise and wizened scholar, but a lazy Notre Dame undergraduate, picked almost at random, whose inner conflict is outright schizophrenia, as displayed in his introductory song 'Bless the Children'. This song is both textually and musically bipolar, swinging from a driving hard rock section in which Faust complains of murderous insanity encroaching upon his consciousness and fantasizes the bloody murder of 'little piggies' to a Michael Jackson-style choral pop refrain, pleading for the 'children of the world' who only need understanding and support (Newman 2003a).

Despite this opening display of both violent aggression and sugary compassion, Faust's real ambition is to acquire 'money, power, control' with as little effort as possible, because he believes 'money, power, control equals love'. Even the devil finds him repulsive, but Lucifer nonetheless outstrips the original Mephistopheles' double-edged promise that 'still what you are, you always must remain' (*F*, 1809) in the rousing song 'The Man', whose gospel inflections indicate not religiosity, but rather the devil's pandering to Faust's megalomania by repeating to him that he is, in fact, 'the man', entitled to bodyguards and special treatment despite the lack of any real achievement on his part. Once Faust himself begins repeating 'I'm the man!' in awestruck tones, Lucifer's work would seem to be done (Newman 2003a).

This has been all too easy, however. Even before the devil has gone to work in earnest, Newman's Faust has already attained the soulless self-absorption that Satina had predicted as Jimmy Paul Beadley's fate. God is ultimately forced to make Faust fall in love with the waitress Margaret, via Cupid's arrow (no doubt inspired by Mephistopheles' mention of that cherub [*F*, 2598]), in order to render him relatively bearable. In response, in 'My Hero' Newman provides Margaret an apparently optimistic love song that is undercut by its own romantic naïveté and by its musical arrangement. As she sings, Margaret infantilizes Faust, describing him as a 'momma's boy' with a 'lazy little smile', and summing up with the simple statement that she likes him and hopes that he likes her (Newman 2003a).

Under the lyrics, however, the orchestra takes a minor turn in the second chorus, as if they know already that Margaret will kill her mother, her brother



and finally her child (Willman 2003: vii, viii)—a series of deaths that Newman has retained from Goethe's original, though now it is God Himself who is indirectly responsible for them. Unfortunately, this 'rather bland cry of love' not only 'sound[s] like something found in a fortune cookie' (Courrier 2003: 278), it also seems to have no connection to the power-hungry character who sings 'The Man' immediately preceding this. As a result, Margaret appears worse than naïve.

The remainder of the plot diverges from Goethe's original most obviously in that, in Newman's version, the devil actually falls in love with Margaret's friend Martha, and has his heart broken when she leaves him. Moreover, at the end, when Margaret is taken up to heaven, Newman's Faust poisons himself in remorse and expires noisily, forestalling any possibility of a second part. Surprisingly, after his suicide Faust too is redeemed, to the devil's chagrin. The superficial romanticism of this ending is deflated by the realization that except for the love laid upon him artificially, the cowardly, lazy and venal Faust has undergone no psychological development whatsoever. Given such poor raw material to work with, neither God nor the devil could have won without cheating—and God, having outcheated the devil, is sympathetic enough to cheer up his opponent by joining him in a reprise of an earlier song, 'Can't Keep a Good Man Down'.

The original album, twelve years in the composition, is loaded with rock stars—James Taylor is God, the Eagles' Don Henley plays Faust, and Linda Ronstadt sings Margaret, with Elton John and Bonnie Raitt in supporting roles and Newman himself playing the devil. Unfortunately, as with many concept albums, including the landmark *Tommy* by The Who (1969), the overall dramaturgy is incoherent. Almost half of the songs on the album are digressions from the main storyline; in fact, the eponymous protagonist appears in only two songs out of seventeen, compared to three for Margaret and eight for the devil (who thus becomes by default another of Newman's reprehensible narrator figures). Only by means of a plot synopsis inserted into the album notes by Newman is it possible to re-create any story from the songs—and yet the synopsis places the songs in a different order from the sequence in which they appear on the album. Finally, as Kevin Courrier sums up,

Newman, who thinks dramatically in his popular songs because he gets to play *all* the characters, doesn't know how to write dramatically for actors. He may have cast performers who best embodied the qualities of the part he'd written, but they did not have the acting skills to develop the characters they were given. (2005: 275)

In 1996 Newman's *Faust* was transformed into the stage musical he had always intended, playing first in San Diego and then in Chicago, and an attempt was made to redress these deficiencies. Several of the original songs were scrapped or reassigned, and others added, in the reworking, while the story was restructured with the aid of playwright David Mamet. Nonetheless, the plot still failed to cohere; the ongoing by-play between God and Lucifer, and the now expanded subplot of the devil's love for Martha, continued to detract from the main plot. In addition, the substitution of talented actor-singers for rock stars—though Henry Faust was now introduced singing his first song while playing electric guitar and dancing on his bed—only made even more apparent how unsympathetic most of the characters were (Brantley 1996; Courrier 2005: 283–4). The *New York Times* declared *Faust* 'an unwitting commentary on the



banality of crowd-pandering musicals' (Brantley 1996). A projected move to Broadway was never realized; at the same time, the original album was proving a commercial failure (Courrier 2005: 284).

Because Newman's is the first adaptation to include God, it is also in a position to reproduce the double wager of Goethe's original directly; however, in this version, while the stakes of the wager with God are raised to allow the devil back into heaven if he wins, the agreement with Faust falls flat. In the original album, the devil 'proffers a contract that Faust signs without reading. The Devil is astonished. Henry explains that he doesn't like to read on his own time' (Newman 2003b: x). Thus there is no wager, but rather a perfunctory pact. In the stage version, Faust's reaction to the devil's demand for his soul becomes one of more active disbelief and suspicion—'What's the catch?' (Lucchesi 2005–6: 43). Moreover, the devil's offer of a recording contract leaves Faust cold: the real money is in video games, and so Faust resists signing until after Valentine's murder, when he needs Lucifer's aid to escape justice (Lucchesi 2003: 115; 2005–6: 38).

Randy Newman's *Faust* ultimately falls between two stools: attempting a backhanded parodic fidelity to Goethe's plot while continually being derailed by Newman's own sympathy for the devil. Kevin Courrier, in fact, compares Newman's work unfavorably to De Palma's *Phantom of the Paradise*, which in Courrier's opinion 'integrates, with shrewdness and bold imagination, Goethe's themes of damnation and salvation into a contemporary setting. By contrast, Newman's *Faust* is a lethargic piece of craftsmanship with no soul to sell' (2005: 282).

Finally, *Faust: Die Rockoper* (*Faust: The Rock Opera*), Rudolf Volz's 1999 recording of Goethe's *Faust I*, not only remains faithful to Goethe's plot, but also exclusively uses Goethe's own German text, though much abridged and transposed, set to rock music. As the work's original website proclaimed, 'Like the Hegelian principle of creating a synthesis from thesis and antithesis, . . . from these hitherto independent and unconnected elements a new product is created' (*Faust: Die Rockoper* 2004)—a product that, by virtue of its alleged fidelity to Goethe's original and its inclusion of Part II (which Volz released as an album in 2004), trumps the loosely adapted 'high-culture' operas of Spohr, Berlioz, Gounod, Boito, etc. At the same time, to be sure, this 'fidelity' has been bought at the price of the majority of Goethe's actual text: Bernd Mahl reckons that 75 per cent of *Faust I* and a full 95 per cent of *Faust II* have had to be cut in Volz's versions (2005: 205–6).

The concept behind Volz's *Faust* is straightforward: Goethe's work is 'one of the most significant in German literature', yet it remains 'for most readers not particularly easily digestible', and so Volz's rock adaptation serves as 'an easy introduction':

The production takes the form of a contemporary rock concert. This is stylistically appropriate, because in recent years such diabolical variants as black metal and death metal have become popular. Mephisto is also a 'devilish fiddler', who indeed sounds more like Jimi Hendrix than Paganini [sic]. (*Faust: Die Rockoper* 2007)

Volz in fact greatly exaggerates the links between his compositions and genuine 'death metal'. The majority of the songs in *Faust I* are solidly in the more melodic mold of so-called 'classic' hard rock/heavy metal; on the original



website Volz declared his models to be Deep Purple and the Scorpions, whose heyday fell in the 1970s and 1980s respectively (*Faust: Die Rockoper* 2004).

Mephistopheles' introduction, for example, 'More Bestial than the Beasts' ('Tierischer als jedes Tier', sung to God in the Prologue; abridged from *F*, 271–90), like most of the devil's songs, is a skillfully executed song based on a solid guitar riff, employing the hard rock technique of using electric guitar and lead vocal as joint solo instruments, and conveying Mephisto's confrontational attitude toward God by means of musical aggression, undercutting the apparently tactful form of address:

Because, O Lord, you show yourself and ask  
about conditions here with us,  
and you were glad in former days to have me near,  
you see me now as one among your servants.  
(*F*, 271–4)

Similar musical stylings are used in Faust's opening monologue, which provides two songs: in 'Turned to Magic' ('Der Magie ergeben', based on *F*, 354–85), a ponderous organ and guitar rhythm creates the musical image of the scholar's life as a tough slog before the open anguish of 'Moonlight' ('Mondenschein', derived from *F*, 385–409), an emotional 'heavy ballad' in which the reverb on the lead guitar reinforces the sense of despair and isolation ('Alas! Am I still wedged within this prison cell?' [*F*, 398]), while the blues-based call-and-response structure foreshadows the fact that Faust is indeed about to be answered from the infernal regions (Malone 2004: 270).

Like his precursors, Volz attempts to use different musical genres to aid characterization: 'While the songs of Faust and Mephisto range from heavy metal to death metal [sic], Gretchen's songs are ordinary pop songs' (*Faust: Die Rockoper* 2007). However, ongoing revisions to the work have altered this relationship somewhat. 'My Peace is Gone' ('Meine Ruh ist hin'), for example, is one of the few songs that can use Goethe's words virtually unchanged (though rearranged from *F*, 3373–413). In Volz's original version, this became a dreary country-pop waltz (Malone 2004: 270–1); the musical effect was a conservative interpretation of Gretchen as an ineffectual and passive character. In more recent recordings, however, 'My Peace is Gone' has become a slow rhythm-and-blues torch song. Several other of Gretchen's songs have also been rewritten, so that she is more of a match vocally for the male characters than she was—though her final number, 'I Killed My Mother' ('Ich hab' meine Mutter umgebracht', based on *F*, 4427–40; 4507–9), remains overly bombastic.

Perhaps the most notable alteration to Volz's work from its initial form is the complete revision of the song 'Still What You Are, You Always Must Remain' ('Du bleibst doch immer'; from the pact scene: *F*, 1806–9); originally, this number was the keystone of Volz's 'Hegelian synthesis':

This synthesis reaches its climax in the song 'Still What You Are, You Always Must Remain', which uses the same music as [Steppenwolf's 1968 hit] 'Born to be Wild'. At first glance it seems impossible that a classic text by Goethe could be reconciled with a classic motorcycle song. (*Faust: Die Rockoper* 2004)

Indeed, one of the triumphs of Volz's work was that this appropriation of an authentic piece of rock history (legally authorized by the original composer, Mars Bonfire) did not stand out musically from the rest of the work as



anachronistic, nor did it make the other songs seem amateurish. In more recent versions of *Faust*, however, this song too has been completely reworked, with lyrics partially rearranged and a completely original melody and musical arrangement. The new version, however, like the rest of Volz's *Faust I*, remains beholden to musical styles three decades old.

This sense of nostalgia is only intensified in Volz's setting of *Faust II*, in which the musical palette is broadened to include art-rock and progressive rock styles in the spirit of Emerson, Lake and Palmer and David Bowie, with musical quotations from Mussorgsky and Chopin (Malone 2004: 272). These styles were originally contemporaries of hard rock; during the 1970s, some bands moved from one style into the other, including Deep Purple, who had been a keyboard-dominated art-rock band before pushing the guitar sound to the fore (Nicholls 2004: 122).

This nostalgia also has another effect, however: Volz declares that 'the Faust theme is independent of historical period, since it deals with crossing the border between ignorance and knowledge, and the automatically associated question of good vs. evil' (*Faust: Die Rockoper* 2007). By synthesizing Goethe's classic text with 'classic' rock, Volz's version updates the text, yet keeps the opera at a vaguely defined historical remove. As a result, the action occurs in an alternate medieval/modern reality, where Faust and Mephistopheles use bicycles, computers, electric violins, cell phones and space shuttles made of CDs while interacting with witches, Greek mythological figures and Holy Roman Emperors. The fact that many of these juxtapositions have a humorous effect, of course, only adds to the show's entertainment value and further sweetens the difficult pill of the text.

Indeed, it is striking that all three of the other Faustian musicals described here are explicitly intended as comedies (and *Fäustling*, too, is hardly dour)—which does not mean that they cannot be seriously intended, but it certainly does not conform to the conventional view of Goethe's masterwork. In fact, both *Starboy* and Volz's *Faust* owe some inspiration to Richard O'Brien's 1973 musical comedy *The Rocky Horror Show*, as is clear from the instrumental and vocal arrangements in *Starboy*, and as openly acknowledged by Volz on the original *Faust: Die Rockoper* website (Malone 2004: 271). These influences show up most obviously in the songs for the 'Erdegeist' or 'Earth-Spirit' (adapted from *F*, 481–513) and in the Walpurgis Night scene (based on *F*, 4128–43).

Volz's *Faust* is most intriguing because it remains a work in progress, still undergoing revision—and in the case of Part I, expansion as well—and appearing in new forms. Where a few years ago Volz seemed focused on international success, with a Spanish-language touring company and an English version available for interested parties (Malone 2004: 272–3), these offshoots have now disappeared from the show's website. Instead, having established regular stagings of the original show on the Brocken, site of Goethe's Walpurgis Night, Volz is attempting to disseminate his work in other German-language media: a DVD version of *Faust I* appeared in 2007, while the original independently distributed single-CD recording of Part I and double-CD version of Part II, after a brief life as a now-deleted triple-CD set from Sony BMG (2005), have expanded into a four-CD set (*Faust: Die Rockoper* 2007). In any case, there appears to be no end in sight for *Faust: The Rock Opera*.

It is notable that all of these productions are essentially the work of figures marginal to the mainstream rock music industry. This does not mean, however,



that their attitudes toward rock music are the same; and in fact, it is the variance in the dynamic between the various creators' attitude toward rock and their attitude toward the Faust theme that makes for the notable differences in tone among the four works.

Despite Paul Williams' obvious affection for the musical styles he parodies, for example, Brian De Palma expresses open disdain for much rock music, and little regard for fans who prefer the Rolling Stones to the music from his film (2003: 18–19). In *Phantom*, rock is truly the devil's music: everyone in the business—Swan, his employees, his entourage and his musicians—is dishonest, if not absurdly evil. Even Phoenix becomes more pliable with every taste of success, until she is finally prepared to sleep with and marry Swan. As for Leach, his appreciation for the Faust legend in the face of Philbin's ignorance demonstrates the gulf between 'real' culture and rock music; at the same time, the diabolical subject of Leach's 'pop cantata' reverses and mocks the messianic themes of the most successful rock operas of the late 1960s and early 1970s, *Godspell*, *Jesus Christ Superstar* and *Tommy*, all of which De Palma despises (2003: 43–4). This does not make Leach a mere mouthpiece of the director, however; on the contrary, he is a pretentious pedant who naïvely thinks that there will be an audience for his solo performance of a 300-page cantata. Moreover, as it is for the other main characters, Leach's mere ambition to become a rock star is itself the first step to damnation since, in De Palma's opinion, rock culture is 'obsessed with death, with destroying yourself, burning yourself up, consuming yourself for entertainment and amusement' (2003: 19). Accordingly, all of the principals die at the film's end, except for Phoenix, whose sanity appears to hang by a thread.

In *Starboy*, by contrast, Randall Paris Dark treats rock music as a positive force, but with no more connection to the realities of the musical genre or to show business: he has Jimmy worship the Rolling Stones, but then gives him stardom in the form of a concert in Las Vegas. In rock music terms, Las Vegas is the home of crooners, not rockers, and iconic only as the locus of Elvis Presley's self-trivializing decline into a 'bloated, pathetic figure' (Tucker 1989: 282, 292–3); but at the same time, Presley's move to Vegas, 'the definitive symbol of affluent middle America, and the global capital of the marriage between show business and gambling' (Inglis 1996: 63–4) marked rock's move into mainstream respectability. And despite his desire to 'live in sin', Jimmy's music is correspondingly relatively bland and nonthreatening, ersatz corporate rock, to match the second-rate devils that disturb him and the counterfeit 'angels' that defeat them. Thus it appears natural that his desire to become a star—bizarrely unconnected to any desire for money—should in the end be happily fulfilled with the same aid from above that allows him to cheat the devil, regain his love and attain a final onstage apotheosis.

If in *Phantom* rock music is the highway to hell and in *Starboy* it turns out to be the stairway to heaven, by the mid-1990s, in *Randy Newman's Faust*, rock is simply the road to nowhere. Newman, a musician's musician, has always been an outsider to the mainstream rock world (Courrier 2005: xiv). His slacker Henry Faust may grab an electric guitar to express himself, but he lusts for a CEO's office, not a star dressing room. Faced with this Faust, God and the devil are equally at a loss. They would have known what to do with Winslow Leach or Jimmy Paul Beadley—or, for that matter, with any of the stars who sing on Newman's original album, all a good fifteen years past their peak. Ironically, the



real wit of Newman's *Faust* lay in these erstwhile giants willingly singing in the service of a musical gadfly who had never had a fraction of their commercial success (Courrier 2005: 271–2); as a mere musical, without their charisma, the joke fell flat.

No wonder, then, that at the turn of the twenty-first century Rudolf Volz's grand design for a rock *Faust* is essentially a nostalgic vision, based on the music of the late 1970s and early 1980s—music of the period between *Phantom* and *Starboy*, when the diabolical forces that De Palma saw in the music emerged to be tamed into familiarity by heavy rotation on radio, and ultimately video, but before ubiquity had reduced them to the utter inconsequence Newman describes. In the 'timeless' context of Volz's production, there is no such thing as wanting to be a rock star; yet at the same time, as *Faust*'s guitar playing and duets with Mephisto demonstrate, in the parallel world constructed by the production's premise, everybody's a rock star already.

Nonetheless, it is rather unsettling to see, in this admittedly limited survey, that a progression nearer to Goethe's actual work has been countered by an odd musical regression back to the era of the first attempts to mix the *Faust* theme with contemporary popular music; the sounds of *Faust: The Rock Opera* may still be popular—and I admit to liking them too—but they are certainly no longer contemporary. Volz's production is supposedly geared to appeal to students (*Faust: Die Rockoper* 2007), but surely that would be better suited to a techno *Faust*; or a hip-hop *Faust*, mixing and rapping; or even the death metal *Faust* that he promises but fails to deliver. One wonders, in fact, whether the real objects of Volz's appeal are not the teachers and parents who are old enough to share his—undoubtedly sincere—affection for music from three decades ago. Of course, such nostalgia can be extremely lucrative, as demonstrated by the licensing of countless classic rock songs, once emblems of a supposed counter-culture, for corporate advertising campaigns.

Volz's music may be inspired by Deep Purple and the Scorpions, but as he himself points out (*Faust: Die Rockoper* 2007), Mephisto's black-and-white makeup is intended to recall not Gustaf Gründgens, but rather the rock band KISS, whose painted faces—Gene Simmons was the Demon, Paul Stanley was the Starchild—masked the 1970s most brazenly successful marketing machine. Randy Newman had satirized this machine long before he wrote his *Faust*: on the cover of his 1979 album *Born Again*, Newman wears a business suit and whiteface, with green dollar signs painted around his eyes in deliberate imitation of KISS; the album's opening song was 'It's Money That I Love' (Courrier 2005: 187–8). De Palma's *Phantom* also parodies KISS, in the form of Swan's band the Undeads; the joke is that all of his bands—the heavy-metal Undeads, the surf-rock Beach Bums and the 1950s-style Juicy Fruits—are the same three singers. KISS, the ultimate hard rock party band, gave new meaning to the idea of the faceless corporation.

In the end, Volz's reverence for Goethe's classic text and his reverence for rock's classic sounds seem just as calculated as KISS' shrewd self-promotion: skilful and sincere, indeed, but ultimately rather hollow—already in its conception, his rock opera is even more a museum piece than Goethe's original. One need not share Brian De Palma's obvious distaste for rock music to ask whether, in Volz's work, *Faust*—not the character, but the little remaining of the text—has indeed sold its soul for rock'n'roll.



## Notes

- 1 All references to Goethe's *Faust*, abbreviated as *F*, are to Salm's translation (Goethe 1985) and Goethe (2005).

## Bibliography

- Ambros, W. and Prokopets, J. (1973), *Fäustling: Spiel in G*, original cast. Metronome [sound recording: vinyl].
- Barnard, S. (1986), *Rock: An Illustrated History*. New York: Schirmer.
- Brantley, B. (1996), 'Two takes on the devil: The charms of the seedy give way to Sunday best', *The New York Times*, (26 October), [http://theater2.nytimes.com/mem/theater/treview.html?\\_+2&res=9D01E4DA1E30F93](http://theater2.nytimes.com/mem/theater/treview.html?_+2&res=9D01E4DA1E30F93) (retrieved 23 May 2007).
- Courrier, K. (2005), *Randy Newman's American Dreams*. Toronto: ECW Press.
- Dark, R. P. (1983), *Starboy*. Toronto: Playwrights Guild of Canada.
- Dark, R. P., Dark, C. and Crowley, I. (1984), *Starboy*, original cast. Ariel [sound recording: vinyl].
- De Palma, B. (2003), *Interviews*, L. F. Knapp (ed.). Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.
- Dunne, S. (1992), 'Randy Newman and the extraordinary moral position', *Popular Music and Society*, 16, (3), 53–62.
- Faust: Die Rockoper* (2004), original version, [www.faust.cc](http://www.faust.cc) (retrieved 24 September 2004).
- Faust: Die Rockoper* (2007), [www.faust.cc](http://www.faust.cc) (retrieved 18 July 2007).
- Goethe, J. W. (1985), *Faust, Part I*, P. Salm (trans.). New York: Bantam.
- (2005), *Faust*, A. Schöne (ed.). Frankfurt/Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag.
- Hinds, E. J. W. (1992), 'The devil sings the blues: Heavy metal, gothic fiction and "postmodern" discourse', *Journal of Popular Culture*, 26, (3), 151–63.
- Inglis, I. (1996), 'Ideology, trajectory & stardom: Elvis Presley & The Beatles', *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music*, 27, (1), 53–78.
- Larkey, E. (1992), 'Austropop: Popular music and national identity in Austria', *Popular Music*, 11, (2), 151–85.
- Lipsitz, G. (1997), 'Remembering Robert Johnson: Romance and reality', *Popular Music and Society*, 21, (4), 39–50.
- Lucchesi, J. (2003), 'Das Spiel von Nintendo und deutscher Misere: Randy Newmans und Hanns Eislers "Faust"', *Peter Weiss Jahrbuch*, 12, 102–16.
- (2005–6), '"Wir lesen die Klassiker fünfmal": Hanns Eislers und Randy Newmans *Faust*', *Faust-Jahrbuch*, 2, 35–47.
- Maddock, S. (1996), '"Whole lotta shakin' goin' on": Racism and early opposition to rock music', *Mid-America: An Historical Review*, 78, (2), 181–202.
- Mahl, B. (2005), '"Faust. Die Rockoper". Rudolf Volz setzt erstmals beide Teile in Töne—ohne Textveränderungen', *Faust-Jahrbuch*, 1, 205–9.
- Malone, P. M. (2004), '"You'll always be the one you are". Faust as rock opera', in O. Durrani, *Faust: Icon of Modern Culture*. London: Helm Information, pp. 263–73.
- Newman, R. (2003a), *Randy Newman's Faust*, expanded reissue. Reprise/Rhino [sound recording: CD].
- (2003b), Plot synopsis, in *Randy Newman's Faust*, expanded reissue. Reprise/Rhino [sound recording: CD].
- Nicholls, D. (2004), 'Virtual opera, or opera between the ears', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 129, (1), 100–42.
- Phantom of the Paradise* (2003), B. De Palma (dir.). Beverly Hills, 20th Century Fox [video: DVD].
- Schmidt, M. H. (1979), 'The German song-writing movement of the late 1960s and 1970s', *Journal of Popular Culture*, 13, (1), 44–54.



- Sullivan, M. (1987) "'More popular than Jesus': The Beatles and the religious far right', *Popular Music*, 6, (3), 313–26.
- Szatmary, D. P. (1991), *Rockin' in Time: A Social History of Rock-and-Roll*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Tucker, B. (1989), "'Tell Tchaikovsky the news': Postmodernism, popular culture, and the emergence of rock'n'roll', *Black Music Research Journal*, 9, (2), 271–95.
- Volz, R. (1999), *Faust I*, Beelzebuben-Ensemble. Xdra Productions [sound recording: CD].
- (2004), *Faust II*, Beelzebuben-Ensemble. Xdra Productions [sound recording: CD].
- Wells, J. D. (1983), 'Me and the devil blues: A study of Robert Johnson and the music of the Rolling Stones', *Popular Music and Society*, 9, (3), 17–24.
- Williams, P. (1998), *Phantom of the Paradise*, original soundtrack. A & M [sound recording: CD].
- Willman, C. (2003), 'Randy Newman's *Faust*: A New Musical Comedy'. Liner notes in *Randy Newman's Faust*, expanded reissue. Reprise/Rhino [sound recording: CD].
- Winkler, P. (1988), 'Randy Newman's Americana', *Popular Music*, 7, (1), 1–26.



*'An outstanding contribution to our understanding of how and why the myth of Faustus has evolved over many centuries and adapted itself to the temper of successive cultures'.*

PROFESSOR OSMAN DURRANI, SCHOOL OF EUROPEAN CULTURE AND LANGUAGES,  
UNIVERSITY OF KENT AT CANTERBURY

This major interdisciplinary collection captures the vitality and increasingly global significance of the Faust figure in literature, theatre and music. Bringing together scholars from around the world, *International Faust Studies* examines questions of adaptation, reception and translation centering on Faust discourse in a diversity of cultural contexts, including the Chinese, Japanese, Indian, African, Brazilian and Canadian, as well as the European, British and American. It broadens the field by including studies of lesser known or neglected Faust discourse, including the translation of Goethe's *Faust* recently attributed to Coleridge, in addition to the canonical.

**Lorna Fitzsimmons** is Associate Professor and Coordinator of Humanities at California State University, Dominguez Hills, Los Angeles, USA.

Contributors include Ehrhard Bahr, Gabriele Becheri, Arnd Bohm, Claudia Brodsky, Antje Budde, Frederick Burwick, Alan Corkhill, Jane Curran, Bree Hadley, Adrian Hsia, Richard Ilgner, David G. John, Katharina Keim, Paul M. Malone and Fred Parker.

C O N T I N U U M   R E C E P T I O N   S T U D I E S

