

Sympathy for the devil



Arik Kayam Professor Golove MUS 265 Analysis Paper " Sympathy For The Devil": The Rolling Stones The first thing that I noticed when I heard this song is how different it is from almost every other song that I have heard. The instruments used seem odd for The Rolling Stones, and rock songs in general. It starts off with a combination of drums and maracas, sounding like Brazilian samba music. Usually rock music has a 4/4 backbeat with a bass drum, but this song does not contain that attribute. There is no rhythm guitar but instead an electric bass and piano is used. The bass guitar is used to replace the rhythm guitar, lead guitarist Keith Richards also plays it, and so this may explain this. I'm going to start off by discussing the lyrics of the song and what they are about. I noticed that one of the lines " every cop is a criminal, and all the sinners saints" seems to suggest that the devil isn't that bad, and that all people have some devil in them. There seems to be confusion of good and evil. The devil is portrayed as " a man of wealth and taste" and polite as well by greeting using " let me please introduce myself. " Another line, " hope you guess my name, but what's puzzling is the nature of my game" intrigued me. This line is not the songwriter saying that I hope you guess that its me playing the devil, it means that the devil is saying I hope you can recognize me because I may be in disguise and I don't do evil myself, I trick people into doing it for me. The difference between good and evil is a continuing theme throughout the song. Jesus Christ is mentioned and the devil says that he " stolen many a mans soul and faith. " The songwriter is not arguing Christian doctrine, he is using the devil as a symbol of how it works in the world and that we need to have our guards up because evil will be disguised and may not appear as obvious to us. This was analyzed from the lines " I watched with glee, while your kings and queens

fought for ten decades for the gods they made. " Now I will discuss the music, the different sections, and how they evolve throughout the song. The track begins with a beat on one drum, and then congas are added as accents to the last beats of the line. Other instruments join in and it sounds like a jungle beat with Jagger howling in the background like a wolf, giving the impression of being in a dark jungle. As the beat continues, piano is introduced with a slow series of chords. This is when Jagger begins by singing: " please allow me to introduce myself, I'm a man of wealth and taste. " After the first four lines bass starts and it builds on the drum mix still going on in the background. The bass makes the song sound angry, and the bass doesn't play a repetitive riff it seems to be improvised or played randomly. The first verse and chorus end with the pianist playing at an even pace, but when the second verse begins he starts playing faster and more frantic. The sound of the instruments matches the lyrics of the song, singing about overthrowing government and the blitzkrieg. At the third verse we can hear background vocals singing at the end of each line. These vocals add an eerie sound to the rhythmic instruments, and Jagger's voice begins to crack on every word. The fourth verse is a guitar solo by Keith Richards and is not really following the beat. He goes from note to note, sliding his fingers across the strings, producing a noticeable sound and then a note is held for several beats. The guitar represents the character that is portrayed in the lyrics, unpredictable. After the guitar solo we hear the chorus, followed by another verse and the chorus again. All of the instruments are played together now and it all seems to be improvised, with no recognizable rhythm. The guitar and vocals play off each other nicely and then Jagger says: " can you guess my name? " referring to the devil. Finally the song fades away to an end.

When I watched a live video of The Rolling Stones performing this song I noticed how into it the whole crowd was. " Sympathy For The Devil" is sort of like an anti-war anthem for people. The whole stage was lit up in red with lights and there was fog on the stage as well to add more emotion to the song. In 2003, The Stones released this as a " maxi-single," with 4 versions of the song. The original was there, as well as remixes by The Neptunes, Fatboy Slim, and Full Phatt. The industrial band Laibach released an entire album containing different covers of this song. The character and tone of the covers are largely very different from the Stones' version. In the opening track the lead singer sings/shouts in a very deep bass voice with a thick Slavic accent. One of their covers contains references to the violence at the Altamont raceway. In 1969 a fan was fatally stabbed during a performance of this song and they didn't play it live for 7 years because of this. <http://www.wordsaboutmusic.co.uk/05/2011/playlist/playlist-sympathy-devil-rolling-stones/> <http://www.lipscomb.umn.edu/rock/CloseUpSymphonyDevil.htm> <http://www.songfacts.com/detail.php?id=509>