

THE WORST MUSIC OF ALL TIME

(and what it can tell us about the best)



with David Misch

I have about a dozen talks and they're all about great artists doing great things. So I thought there should be at least one about bad.

And you say... Why, Lord, why? Why would anyone want to listen to bad music?

And the answer is: Because understanding why something doesn't work actually gives insight into what does. The first step is to figure out what makes a song incredibly incompetent, astonishingly awful, melodically miserable.

THE WORST MUSIC OF ALL TIME looks at the strange relationship between terrific and terrible with torturous tunes from rock, folk, jazz, classical and Broadway, sometimes by unexpected artists (The Beatles! Elvis! Bob Dylan! Billy Joel! William Shatner!!!).

Of course no one sets out to make a sucky song; it can come from lack of talent, but also from poor timing, misguided instincts, or plain bad luck. We'll even see how the same thing that makes one song stink can make another one brilliant, like a hilariously horrible sax solo which uses the same idea as a jazz classic.

Most important, quality is subjective; everything we'll hear is genuinely loved by someone. Just like there are probably people out there who think your favorite song – or TV show or movie or poem or painting – is an abomination.

THE WORST MUSIC OF ALL TIME does a deep dive into the idea of failure, to illuminate the nature of success. And it reveals how, amazingly, even the “worst” music can contain the seeds of something wonderful.

David Misch is a former comedian, screenwriter (“Mork and Mindy,” “The Muppets Take Manhattan,” “Saturday Night Live”), author (“Funny: The Book”), teacher (courses on comedy at USC and musical satire at UCLA) and lecturer at Yale, Columbia, Oxford, the Smithsonian, Raindance Film Festival (London), CineStudio Paris, University of Sydney, VIEW Cinema Conference (Torino, Italy), American Film Institute, Grammy Museum, and lifelong learning programs around the country. More at davidmisch.com.