Gaining Insight Through Music: An Exploration into the Popular 80’s Classic, Labyrinth

One ability that most music listeners have is naming a song that describes a time in their life. Whether it be a break-up, a first car, or just having a good time, it seems that there is a song that can narrate pretty much any major encounter. But beyond their ability to simply connect with people, some songs can parallel other situations, such as scenes in poetry, books, or movies, and help give a better understanding of the work overall. One example of this can be seen in ACH Smith’s novelization of Jim Henson’s Labyrinth. In this story, a brooding, teenage girl, named Sarah, must undertake an adventure to save the baby brother she has banished away to the Goblin King. It is a fascinating tale, full of many ups and downs, but overall the story is that of Sarah’s inward and outward journey. It appears that by exploring songs such as “We’re Not Gonna Take It,” “Break My Stride,” and “We Are The Champions,” one can see many instances of how these songs are able to characterize remarkably well, many pivotal moments within the journey Sarah faced in ACH Smith’s Labyrinth.

Looking first at “We’re Not Gonna Take It,” by Twisted Sister, one can see the similarities between the conflict characterized in the song itself, and that of the one faced by Sarah in relation to her stepmother. In the story, Sarah speaks about how her “stepmother is ruthlessly not fair” to her, and treats her as if she is a kept nanny for her baby brother, Toby (Smith 13). Although the source of their conflict is unclear, what is quite clear is that Sarah keeps her stepmother at a distance, both emotionally and
quite physically as seen by the statement: “Sarah made a point of never touching her stepmother, not even brushing against her clothes” (Smith 14). In looking at the song, “We’re not Gonna Take It,” these feelings of resentment are echoed: “Oh you’re so condescending, your gall never ending/We don’t want nothing, not a thing from you” (11-12). In fact, this line could have easily been said by Sarah herself in the book, given her tendencies to be quite overdramatic at times in describing her disagreements with her stepmother. Another source of conflict with her stepmother is that Sarah feels she is an evil intruder upon her life, because she is not her real mom. This is even noticed by her stepmother who, exasperated by Sarah, proclaims to her husband that, “I don’t know what to do anymore. [Sarah] treats me like the wicked stepmother in a fairy tale, no matter what I say” (Smith 17). And this certainly appears so because for everything her stepmother says, Sarah has some snide remark for her in return. A line from the song that may portray an insight into what Sarah was inwardly feeling toward her stepmother could be the line: “We’ll fight the powers that be just, don’t pick our destiny ‘cause/You don’t know us, you don’t belong” (6-7). This comparison reiterates that the stepmother was not wanted, and was not a part of Sarah’s family. Lastly, one can not ignore the overall chant of the song, a repeating, “We’re Not Gonna Take It,” that really seems to capture Sarah’s overall feelings of this first phase of the story (1). In fact, it was her being fed-up, and unwilling to take the life she was living that lead her to summon the Goblin King, who takes her brother away, and thus begins the transition to the next part of her journey.

Next, in a dramatic change of tone, the next phase of the story is one of Sarah’s perseverance through the labyrinth to find her brother, which can be illustrated by the song, “Break My Stride,” by Matthew Wilder. This song, much like Sarah’s journey and the hardships she faced, is all about keeping headed towards the goal, and not letting anything get in the way.

The song is interesting because it starts out in a dream, and about a journey to find someone, as seen by the lyric: “Last night I had the strangest dream/I sailed away to China, in a little row boat to find ya” (2-
What makes it interesting is that Sarah’s journey in the story has sort of a dream like quality as well; leaving the reader unsure at the end of what, if anything, had ever happened at all. And while Sarah didn’t quite travel to China, she did have to go somewhere else, and weather a lot of obstacles to get her brother back. Next, as Sarah conquers most of the dangerous obstacles set before her by the Goblin King, she grows more confident that she just might truly be able to accomplish her goal, proclaiming at one point, “We’re going to make it” (Smith 182). Wilder’s song characterizes this perfectly with the verse: “You’re on the road and now you pray you’ll last/The road behind you was rocky/But now you’re feeling cocky” (11-13). This means that all of the trials she faced while in the labyrinth boosted her courage, enabling her to face, and eventually defeat the Goblin King in the final scene.

Lastly, it seems there is only one song that captures the triumph of Sarah’s victory against the Goblin King, and it is none other than the Queen classic, “We Are The Champions.” This song is a great example because it talks about “[paying dues]/time after time,” which is precisely what Sarah did with each obstacle she faced, time and time again (1-2). It appears that no matter what Sarah went through: Bogs of Eternal Stench, deceptive friends, or constant chaos, she kept going, and kept a strong demeanor. One can see parallels of this in the lyric from the song: “I’ve had my share of sand kicked in my face/But I’ve come through” (7-8). Lastly, in the story Sarah did have a many number of friends that helped her through the labyrinth, for which she accredited with helping her make it to the end of her journey. In the song, there is also a mention of friends that sound a lot like Sarah’s: “We are the champions, my friends, /and we’ll keep on fighting ‘til the end” (24-25). This seems to be a very close comparison in that Sarah’s friends did indeed stay with her right up until the end; to the very moment she went on to defeat the Goblin King, and by doing so, made them all champions.

Overall, one can see how the above songs paint a descriptive picture of Smith’s novelization through song. These songs are able to illuminate and capture the different phases of Sarah’s journey: the
angst of a young girl, her perseverance in the face of challenge, and finally her epic victory. The songs provides a musical roadmap for one that if they couldn’t fully understand the story itself, perhaps they could at least relate to the emotions felt by Sarah, as explained by the songs. For as mentioned before, music has a way of connecting people, and it is apparent that these songs can be used to connect a reader to this story.

Works Cited


