

Doctors in popular songs:

the dark side of the moon?

Popular music and song lyrics can impact audiences in their millions. A focus on doctors in popular songs has centred on doctors as healers, drug providers, sexual partners, or sexual offenders. To some extent, authors of popular song lyrics describing doctors seem to be attracted to the possible sinister and dark sides of a doctor's conduct.

Popular music is a generic term for a wide variety of music types that appeal to the tastes of a large segment of the population.^{1,2} Songwriters and musicians, just like everyone else, depend on the assistance of doctors in life so their songs may reflect those experiences.³ Many of these songs represent one of a few types of descriptions of the medical profession.

THE HEALER

Since the first version of 'Lovesick Blues' was released by Emmett Miller in 1928, numerous songs about being unhappy in love have been written. In many of them the doctor is presented as a healer of lovesickness and sexual frustration.

The doctor is consulted with the hope that, being a professional, they may relieve the patient's suffering. The theme has one of its most explicit expressions in the 1966 hit 'Good Lovin'' by the Young Rascals. The song begins with the lines 'I was feeling so bad/I asked my family doctor just what I had/I said, "Doctor (Doctor)/Mr. M.D. (Doctor)/Now can you tell me what's ailing me (Doctor)?"'. The doctor easily makes the diagnosis. The patient suffers from fever simply because he gets too little 'Good Lovin'' and the doctor advises him to go home and ask for some 'Good Lovin''. In other songs, such as Aretha Franklin's 'Dr. Feelgood', doctors are seen as healers, psychotherapists, or psychiatrists who are consulted because of existential, psychic, or psychiatric crises or conditions.

THE DRUG PROVIDER

Many songs praise drugs and what they

have to offer; other songs describe the self-destructive addiction to drugs. Examples of these types are 'Cocaine' by JJ Cale, covered with great success by Eric Clapton, and 'The Needle and the Damage Done' by Neil Young. In songs like 'Sleeping Pills' by Suede and 'The Drugs Don't Work' by the Verve, addiction to tranquillisers is discussed. In 'Mother's Little Helper', which is a metaphorical designation of 'a little yellow pill ... [to get] her through her busy day' by the Rolling Stones, the doctor is under pressure to prescribe pharmacotherapy, probably in the form of a benzodiazepine. Meanwhile, 'Sister Morphine' by the Rolling Stones deals with addiction to 'Cousin Cocaine' as well as 'Sister Morphine'.

Doctors may also be involved in dealing drugs, as in Scritti Politti's 'Dr Abernathy'. In Steely Dan's song 'Doctor Wu', the doctor is dealing illegal drugs. However, 'Dr. Robert' by the Beatles praises the doctor as a healthcare professional whom one may call upon day and night because Dr. Robert has a 'special cup' to offer for efficacious treatment.

SEXUAL RELATIONS WITH PATIENTS

Doctors may be erotically attractive partners, as described by the Freshies in 'Dancin' Doctors'. The idea that doctors may have sexual relations with patients is reflected in Leonard Cohen's song 'I'm Your Man', where a sexual attraction is hinted at in the lines 'If you want a doctor/I'll examine every inch of you'. In the duet 'Goodness Gracious Me' by Peter Sellers and Sophia Loren, the patient and the doctor confirm a mutual attraction. In the song 'Lady Doctor' by Graham Parker and the Rumour, the male patient and the female doctor are also in an erotic relationship: 'Baby let that lady mess on with you.' Other songs describe doctors as sexual offenders. In 'Doctor Brown' by Fleetwood Mac, about a doctor who can cure women without pharmacotherapy, it is more than suggested that the doctor is providing sexual healing. In Fairport Convention's 'Doctor of Physick',

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a father warns his daughter against 'Doctor Monk', who is sexually abusing young girls. In 'Trust me I'm the Doctor' by the Blizzards, the narrator and his sworn men travel abroad and, pretending to be doctors, abuse girls.

THE DARK SIDE OF THE MOON

The conception of doctors as drug dealers may originate from a time when a more liberal prescription of tranquillisers and opioid analgesics prevailed.⁴ The confidentiality and intimacy inherent in the doctor-patient relationship may cause boundaries to blur and create associations of erotic attraction and sexually offensive behaviour. Because popular songs reach out to huge audiences their descriptions of doctors could potentially have an impact on patients' perception of the medical profession. However, popular songs are written and composed primarily to attract the attention of young people. For that purpose, potential borderline and dramatic behaviour and more obscure stories about the medical profession may be more compelling, just as the dark side of the moon may be to many people. Indeed, such descriptions of doctors probably say as much about songwriters as about the medical profession.

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