

## The Final Stepping Stone

There are few artists throughout time that have managed to stay at the top of their game, let alone relevant, as the decades shift, and the styles change. This was never the issue for David Bowie, who always proved to be able to adapt, and even be the one responsible for many of the shifts in music taste during his long career. Again, unlike most artists, there is no evident song writing process or formula Bowie seemed to follow. Each song is unique to itself, with unorthodox choices being made to everyone's surprise and delight. It is because of this innate creativity inside of Bowie that he was able to produce as many songs and albums as he did, amassing over four hundred songs and twenty-five albums over his fifty-four-year career.

The collection of music he has left behind for the world to enjoy is only identifiable as his own due to his unique voice and lyrics. The sound on each song, and the mood of each album isolate themselves as steppingstones Bowie had made during his evolution as an artist. The first steppingstone came in 1967, when he released his debut self-titled album. The album plays to the popular music of the time and did not feature any of Bowie's personified strangeness. He had not yet found his identity as a musician, and simply produced a sound that would keep him fed and off the streets. In his later years he tried hard to bury the work he had done on the album, as he was not proud of it and claimed it unworthy. This attitude was to be expected. A young musician at the top of the charts and influencing the world over, had ideal images and standards set for himself, and it is clear his first album met neither. He released his second album two years later, under the same name in hopes of drowning out the memory of the prior. This is when he first found success and a musical identity. The first track on the album, "Space Oddity", is absolutely one of the most unique songs in the history of rock. Unlike anything heard before it, the song's focus on the mysteries of outer space and the unfortunate Major Tom, captivated listeners and continues to do so today. So much in fact, that the song is being played on a continuous loop into the depths of space, hopefully giving the first contact with other life the same joy the people of Earth received from his masterpiece. This steppingstone of an album proved to be more of a launching pad, as his hit song would be the embodiment of his later persona Ziggy Stardust in the following decade.

Over the years, David Bowie would give birth to and kill various identities of himself. The most prolific of which being Ziggy Stardust, a bisexual demigod sent to save the world. However, other personas such as Aladdin Sane and The Thin White Duke were just as fundamental in progressing Bowie to become the artist no one will be able to compare to. In doing so he was able to eventually shed the notion of needing to outrun his work from the past. Instead, he chose to embrace his collection of genre and culture defining personas and combine them together, giving the world a first look at the true David Bowie.

Unfortunately, this attitude did not arise until 2016, and on his twenty-fifth and final album, "Blackstar". For those of you who aren't aware, this is the year the world lost David Bowie. He had been battling liver cancer for eighteen months, and after realizing he was losing the battle, he decided to use his remaining time doing what he loved, making music. He decided to approach the album the way he used to in his youth, beginning with the saxophone. It was the first instrument he had learned to play, so it only seems right that it should be once again at the

center of his music. Bowie then collaborated with fellow musicians, with the emphasis being on jazz. This may seem strange to someone unfamiliar with Bowie's history, but it speaks volumes to his character and origin. His first love affair with music came from his older brother who introduced him to the great jazz musicians of the time. Unfortunately, his brother had demons of his own to battle, including a crippling schizophrenia. His brother eventually committed suicide during the height of Bowie's career, an act that he was never able to truly overcome. He commemorates his lost brother through his music, including the jazz instruments the two loved so much throughout his albums. He does the same on his final, as jazz solos and spirited orchestras startle the listener who never know when to expect it. The album still holds the same experimental aspect that Bowie had made his career off of, but this one seems somehow bolder. On one song alone, the ten-minute-long title track, he is able to include a dreadful sense of discomfort in a theatrical style full of instruments. The sci-fi effects and ominous sounds combine with futuristic hope, and an experience that no listener had ever had before is once again produced from the visionary Bowie.

While listening to the album, it is impossible to escape from the feeling that there is discontent within Bowie as he is preparing to face the end of his life. A longing to continue entertaining the masses and rock the world escape from the album. However, there is still light at the end of tunnel, as each song also contains his trademarked synthesizer style, and the aura of a futuristic reality still unknown to the rest of the world. With songs that contain both dreadful dismay and unrelenting hope for the next chapter, Bowie has achieved a late style unlike any other, but can any of us be surprised by this? It is David fucking Bowie after all. In his final project, he succeeded in once again showing the fluidity in his style, this time combining the aspects of his past personas and displaying the true David Bowie to the world once and for all. I find it no surprise that the album art for "Blackstar" features five segments of a star, with one whole star looming over them all. I look at the segments as the past personas that got him to where he needed to go, with the focal point on the final product, David Bowie himself, now free of the personas and masks that hid his true self for decades.

A career that was never meant to be was now approaching the finale no one wanted to see, but couldn't possibly miss. His half a century career was nothing short of extraordinary, helping define the music we listen to whether he was directly involved or not. The only constants among all of his music, is his never faltering quality of lyrics, and his unwavering outlook towards the future. David Bowie managed to bring his visions to life, across countless instruments and multiple decades. It has been five years since his untimely death to cancer, and each day the world seems a little less magical. But as British writer and movie star, Simon Pegg once said, "If you're sad today, just remember that the world is over 4 billion years old and you somehow managed to exist at the same time as David Bowie."