

THE ROUNDUP

BY AND FOR THE STUDENTS OF HALF HOLLOW HILLS HIGH SCHOOL WEST

Farewell to David Bowie

1947-2016

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Only hours after rumors began circulating about a death in the elite family of the musical world, Twitter exploded with overwhelming reaction. After all, the famed artist had gone through much trouble to cover his diagnosis of liver cancer 18 months prior. In fact, not many outside of his immediate family knew of the disease. However, as soon as public relations correspondents had delivered the heart-wrenching news, the Internet responded in a very strange way: no updates, no notifications, nothing. Time seemed to stand still. David Bowie was dead.

Moments after the detested confirmation, rapper Kanye West expressed his mourning on Twitter: "David Bowie was one of my most important inspirations, so fearless, so creative, he gave us magic for a lifetime."

The multi-genre artist radiated magic for several generations. Bowie himself paved the way for most, if not all, artists of our time by bending nearly all the rules that the music industry had laid out for him at the start of his career in the early 1960s. There were no music videos, no entrancing performances, no alter-egos, and certainly no self-expression of any kind outside the black and white molds of what was considered strictly "masculine" and "feminine." Yet, one man, almost seeming like he was from another planet, managed to bend those rules, thus shaping new musical and stylistic norms.

In 2016, we can still see these remnants left behind. On the runway,

male models are sometimes accented with a touch of dramatic makeup, a product of Bowie's style that forever inspired menswear designers to add a feminine touch and "glam rock" additions to their looks. "Bowie paved the way for personal expression," said Hills West English teacher Mr. Riccuiti, "which teenagers sometimes take for granted. Not that it's easy being a teenager in 2016, but it's somewhat easier to be who you are or who you want to be now compared to before David Bowie."

Whether it be the Jaden Smith-fronted Louis Vuitton Spring womenswear line or Sam Smith's accented eyeliner, Ruby Rose on Orange is the New Black, or Halsey shaving

her head to rid herself of forced ties to femininity; Bowie pioneered all of it, and made people realize that being different wasn't dangerous or wrong, because he was leading the way. While countless chart-toppers credit Bowie as an influence, there is no doubt that Bowie had a large impact on Lady Gaga as a performer. Although she is more often compared to the appearing and reappearing Madonna, the parallels that can be drawn from Bowie and Gaga are undeniable, between multi-genre leaping, experimental styles in music and fashion, gender-bending alternate egos and expressing a deep relationship with fame. As of recently, Gaga admitted, "Every morning I wake up and think, 'What would Bowie do?'"

"I love Lady Gaga's music and her ability to express herself freely," said Junior Simran Sahansra. "She definitely drew a lot of inspiration from pioneers like Bowie. Without him, we wouldn't have a lot of what we have today - from

Miley Cyrus' eccentric performances to Lady Gaga's dress



made out of meat...[Bowie] merged visuals to the music.” Bowie’s impact, described by biographer David Buckley, “challenged the core belief of the rock music of its day.” Music reviewer Brad Filicky wrote that over five decades, Bowie was “a musical chameleon, changing and dictating trends as much as he has altered his style to fit, influencing fashion and pop culture.” Through selling an estimated 140 million records, awarded fourteen Platinum album certifications, eighteen Gold and eight Silver, Bowie was a man who redefined not only music, but the entirety of popular culture.

“I actually became a fan of his after he died,” said Mark Negrón, a Hills West sophomore. “I wanted to pay my respects by listening to a bunch of his songs on Spotify. I regret not hearing most of these [before his death]. My favorite song [of his] is Starman, mainly because of the chorus and melody. It sticks in your head in a good way.”

This week, the world as a whole had to bid farewell to one of music’s greatest masters. Mark replied, “I think it’ll take a similar amount of time as it took to accept that Michael Jackson had died. Even still, no one will ever truly get over David Bowie - he’s a legendary musician.”

The life David Bowie started modestly (birth name David Jones), as he grew up playing several instruments, including the saxophone and the recorder, yet his instructors remarked that his voice was merely “adequate” for the school choir. Starting at the age of 15, Bowie began to play in several rock ‘n roll groups, playing mostly at youth gatherings and weddings, although Bowie craved for more exposure. He finally settled on the name David Bowie after the 19th century frontiersman. Despite countless failed musical projects, unmotivated collaborators and an unsuccessful debut album, the young musician prevailed, and success came in the form of 1969’s *Space*

Oddity, which reached the top 20 charts in 6 countries, including America and the UK.

“Every morning I wake up and think, ‘What would Bowie do?’” Lady Gaga

Yet, Bowie’s most notable on-stage persona wouldn’t have finished evolving until his third album in 1970, *The Man Who Sold the World*, an album whose cover portrays the young rising star draped across a dressing couch, decked out in a floor-length dress and long, curly brunette locks. This cover, however, was censored heavily in the United States as the elements shown were clearly too controversial in that region, especially while the US was in the midst of the sexual revolution

and the modern gay rights movement that had been ignited just months before. Instead of utilizing the original album cover, using an alternate display which included a psychedelic portrait of Bowie. However, a mere album

cover was nothing compared to a new face that shook the planet. In fact, Bowie’s ship had truly landed, and out emerged a fully-formed, musically evolved alien from somewhere unknown. His name was Ziggy Stardust.

“The relatively short-lived Ziggy persona proved to be one facet of a career marked by reinvention, musical innovation and visual presentation,” read the caption for *Space Oddity*, a 1972 art piece that was displayed at the Metropolitan Museum of Art during a tribute exhibition to the artist. The concept album *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders From Mars* was a true success (notably peaking at #5 on the UK Albums Chart) characterized by glamorous, lipstick-tainted rock ‘n roll played by a flamboyant, deity-like rockstar hailing from celestial. Critics were enthralled: while artists of his time were dressing down, he was dressing up. Bowie’s ability to embrace strangeness, wearing makeup while playing captivating music inspired generations of so-called “outsiders” to stay true to themselves.

