



February's Composer of the Month

David Bowie

David Bowie was a British songwriter and performer.

He was born David Robert Jones on 8th January, 1947 in Brixton, London.

He was interested in music from a young age. While he was at primary school he was part of his school choir and played the recorder.

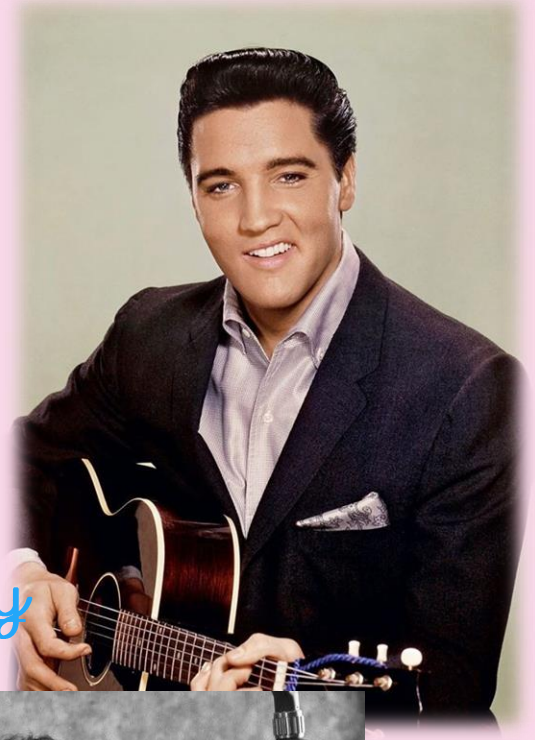
He sadly died on 10th January, 2016 in New York, after a battle with cancer.

Early Music

As a teenager, David became interested in jazz music. He started playing the saxophone and had lessons with Ronnie Ross, a well-known British jazz musician.

When David was 15 years old, he formed his first band, The Kon-rads.

David enjoyed listening to the music of performers, such as Fats Domino and Elvis Presley. When David heard the song 'Tutti Frutti' by American singer, Little Richard, he said he "heard God."



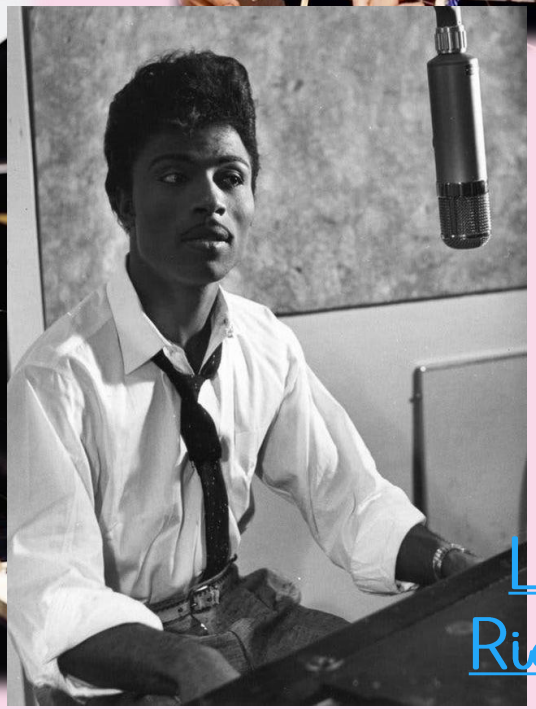
Elvis Presley

Jazz Music :

Black musicians developed jazz in New Orleans in the USA in the early 20th century. Jazz music is made up of improvisation (creating music on the spot) and syncopation (emphasising beats that wouldn't normally be emphasised).

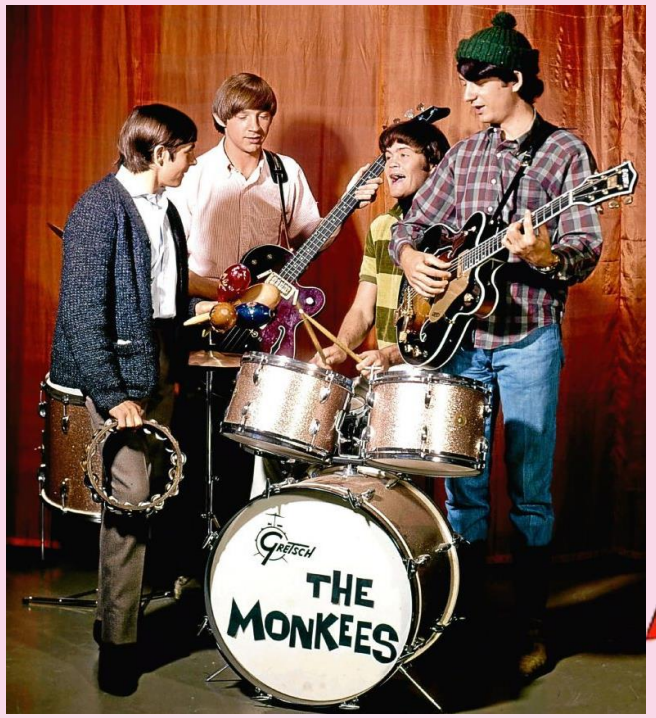


Fats Domino



Little Richard

A New Name



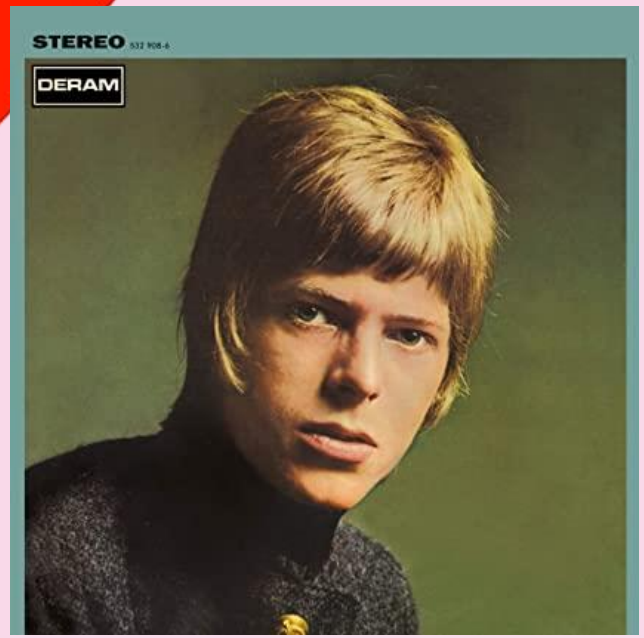
David continued to develop his music and was in several different bands.

As David became more well-known, people sometimes mixed him up with another musician called Davy Jones, who was in a famous band called The Monkees. They also had their own TV show and were very popular but David didn't want to be mistaken for someone else he wanted to stand out!

So in 1966, David decided to change his name to

David Bowie.

In 1967, Bowie released his first album, which was called 'David Bowie'. Unlike a lot of pop albums at the time, which used instruments such as guitars and drums, the album had lots of orchestral instruments, such as trumpets and oboes.



Have a listen to "Love You Til Tuesday" - can you hear the different instruments?
Can you find the pulse of the music?

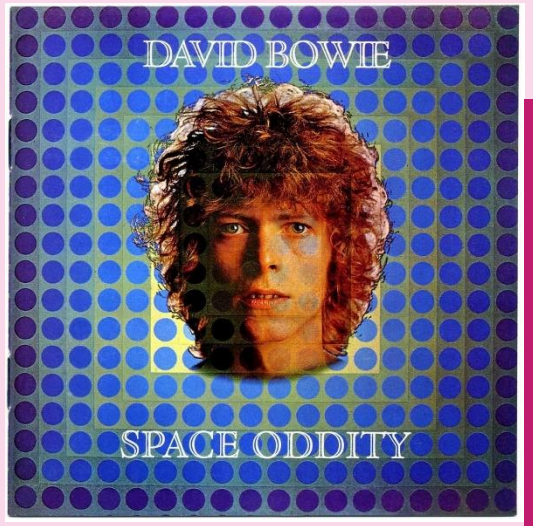
Definition : Album

A collection of six or more songs or that is longer than 25 minutes.

‘Space Oddity’

In 1969, Bowie had his first big hit, ‘Space Oddity’. The lyrics tell the story of an astronaut’s journey into space and explain what the astronaut can see from space.

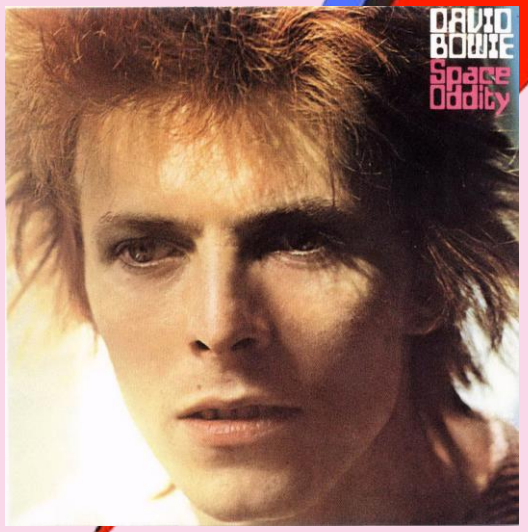
The song was released a few days before the Apollo 11 mission, which saw the first humans land on the moon. ‘Space Oddity’ reached number five in the UK charts. The same year, Bowie released a second album, also called ‘Space Oddity’.



Listen to the title track.

What is the name of the astronaut?

Can you describe how the song makes you feel?



Talk About It

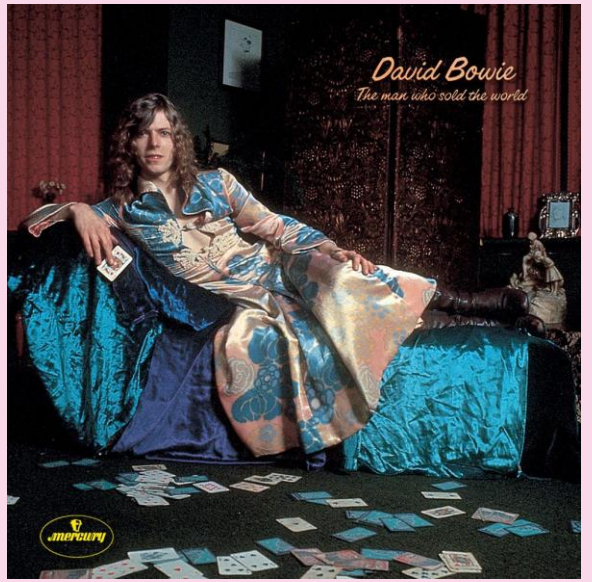
What current world events do you think might inspire today’s musicians and artists?

Fashion

Bowie enjoyed experimenting with different looks and fashion.

In 1971, Bowie travelled to the USA to promote his new album, 'The Man Who Sold the World'. On the original front cover of this album, Bowie wore a dress, which he described as 'a man's dress'. He also wore the dress during many of the interviews he did in the USA. At the time, many people were shocked at a man wearing a dress and the American front cover of the album was changed to show Bowie wearing trousers.





Did You Know...?

One of Bowie's eyes looked darker than the other because the pupil in that eye was bigger. This was the result of getting into a fight while he was still at school.

Discuss :

Why do you think people in the USA were so shocked at a man wearing a dress?

Do you think that would get the same reaction today? Why?

Ziggy Stardust

In 1972, Bowie created a character called Ziggy Stardust. Bowie's album 'The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust' told the story of Ziggy, who was an alien rock star who visited earth. This new character became popular after an appearance on a television show called 'Top of the Pops', where Ziggy performed the song, 'Starman'.

Bowie performed a world tour, which is often known as the 'Ziggy Tour'.





Did You Know...?

'Top of the Pops' was a weekly show that featured the latest hits of the day. The world's most famous artists featured on the show. It ran from 1964 to 2006.

Glam Rock





Bowie's Ziggy Stardust era was part of a music genre called Glam Rock. Glam Rock featured guitars, drums and driving rhythms. The (mostly male) performers wore make-up, brightly coloured clothes and often had long hair. Because of the amount of glitter the performers wore, Glam Rock was sometimes known as Glitter Rock. One of Bowie's most well-known hits from this era is 'Life on Mars'.





Did You Know...?

In the 2000s, two television programmes about police officers time travelling to the 1970s and 1980s were made. They were called 'Life on Mars' and 'Ashes to Ashes'. Bowie's music featured throughout both shows.

Musical Styles

In the late 1970s, Bowie moved to Berlin, Germany, as he had become interested in the German music scene. While living there, he released three albums which became known as 'The Berlin Trilogy'. The music on these albums was simpler, ambient music, which focused on the atmosphere and feeling of a piece of music. Ambient music can sometimes be instrumental (without lyrics). 'Heroes' is one of Bowie's best known hits from The Berlin Trilogy.



James Brown
"Get Up Offa that Thing"

Aretha Franklin
"Respect"



Throughout his career, he was influenced by lots of different genres of music.

Early in his career, he experimented with many different styles of music, including folk, pop and rock.

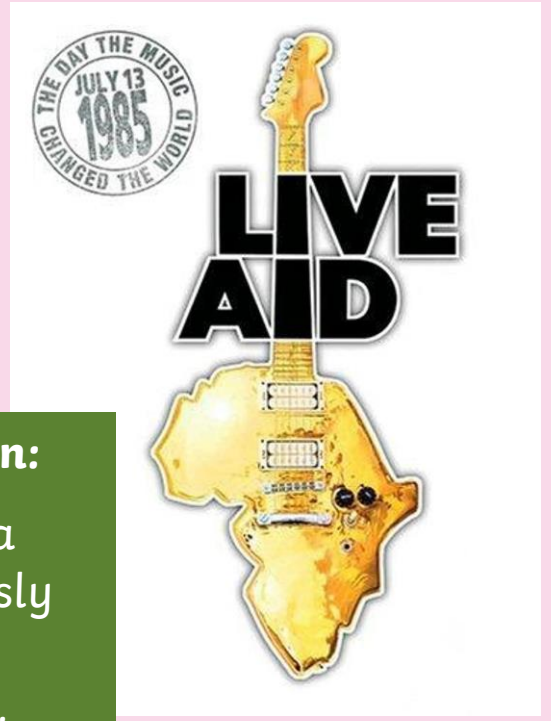
Later on, he became inspired by the music he heard in the USA and in particular soul music. Soul music was performed by musicians such as **Aretha Franklin** and **James Brown**. It was inspired by gospel and blues music and often had themes of love and relationships.

Live Aid

In July 1985, two Live Aid concerts were held at Wembley Stadium, London in the UK and the JFK Stadium, Philadelphia in the USA. They featured the world's biggest stars.

The aim was to raise money to support people living in Ethiopia, where there had been a dreadful famine. Over 1.5 billion people across the world watched the concerts.

David, who was in the Wembley concert, performed four songs, finishing with his hit 'Heroes'.



Cover Version:

A version of a song previously sung by someone else.

The same year, he released a cover version of 'Dancing in the Streets' with Mick Jagger, who was the lead singer of The Rolling Stones. The song reached number one in the UK charts, with all proceeds going to Live Aid.





Listen :

'Dancing in the Street' was originally sung in the 1960s by Motown group Martha and the Vandellas. Listen to the original version and the one by David Bowie and Mick Jagger.

How are they similar? How are they different? Which version do you prefer and why?

Working with Others

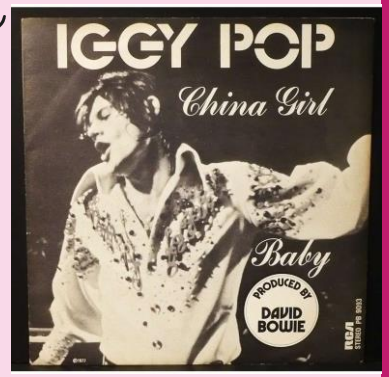
As well as Live Aid, Bowie made a number of notable collaborations with other musicians.

In 1975, he recorded the song, 'Fame', with John Lennon from The Beatles. The song became Bowie's first US number one hit.

He had a UK number one in 1981 when he collaborated with the rock group, Queen. 'Under Pressure' was a worldwide hit and was even sampled in a famous 1990 rap song called "Ice, Ice Baby" by Vanilla Ice.

In May 1978, Bowie worked with the Philadelphia Orchestra to narrate a story to go alongside 'Peter and the Wolf', a classical piece of music by Prokofiev.

As well as writing his own music, Bowie composed songs for other artists, including his friend, Iggy Pop.



Listen :

One of the most famous songs he write for Iggy Pop was called "China Girl".
Can you hear his influence in the song, even though it isn't sung by him?
Now listen to the version recorded by David Bowie.
Which do you prefer and why?

Talk About It

Why do you think Bowie wrote hits for other performers, instead of keeping all his songs for himself?

Other Interests

Even with his busy music career, Bowie also pursued his love of acting, appearing in many films, plays and television shows. His films included the Second World War drama, 'Merry Christmas, Mr Lawrence' and the science fiction film, 'The Man Who Fell to Earth'.

His most well-known acting role was in 'Labyrinth', where he appeared as the Goblin King. The film was directed by Jim Henson, creator of The Muppets.

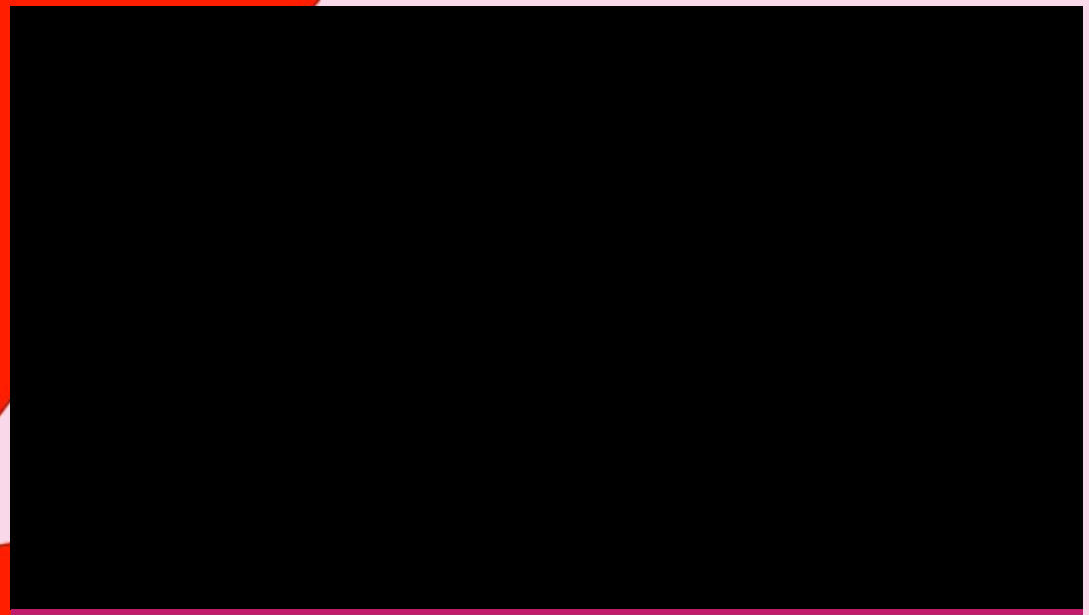
He even performed in a play on Broadway in New York!



Image from "The Man Who Fell to Earth" (1976)

Talk About It

Would you rather be a musician, actor or artist? Explain why.



"As the World Falls Down" written by David Bowie, along with five other songs for the movie soundtrack.

David also enjoyed painting; he carried a sketchbook with him on his travels.

He actually painted a self portrait which was the cover for his 1995 album, 'Outside'. That same year, an exhibition of his paintings was held in London.



Awards

During his career, Bowie won many music awards. These include an Ivor Novello and several Brit Awards and Grammys.

In 2000, Bowie was offered a CBE and, in 2003, was offered a knighthood. He turned down both of these awards. He said, "I seriously don't know what it's for. It's not what I spent my life working for... it's just not for me."

Bowie was listed in the BBC's 100 greatest Britons and in Rolling Stone magazine's 100 greatest artists of all time.

In 1997, Bowie was given a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, an honour awarded to the most famous people in the entertainment industry.

Inspiration

In 2014, David was diagnosed with cancer and, on 10th January 2016, he died, days after his final album, 'Blackstar', was released.

Throughout his career, he has influenced many musicians, both of his generation and those from younger generations, such as Harry Styles and Lady Gaga. In a poll of modern musicians, he was voted as the most influential artist in history.



Fashion Icon

Bowie's style has also inspired fashion designers including Jean Paul Gaultier, Tommy Hilfiger and Dolce and Gabbana.

Did You Know...?

In 2008, an endangered spider was named Heteropoda davidbowie in Bowie's honour.

Harry Styles - "Adore You"





Lady Gaga - "Born This Way"



"Tomorrow belongs to those who can hear it coming."

TTYP

What do you think David Bowie meant?