

Giovanni Ippolito

FOR EVERYMAN – MY CITY OF RUINS

EXAMPLES OF CLASSICISM IN ROCK



@ Giovanni Ippolito – Gipgio Records, 2022

Partly and freely based on “100% American – La Classicità Del Rock Americano”  
(Giovanni Ippolito - 2017, Arcana)

## For Everyman

Everybody I talk to is ready to leave with the light of the morning. They've seen the end coming down long enough to believe that they've heard their last warning. Standing alone, each has his own ticket in his hand. And as the evening descends, I sit thinking 'bout Everyman. [...] Waiting here for Everyman. Make it on your own if you think you can. If you see somewhere to go, I understand. I'm not trying to tell you that I've seen the plan. Turn and walk away if you think I am but don't think too badly of one who's left holding sand, he's just another dreamer, dreaming 'bout Everyman.

This is one of the greatest exemplars of song-form in rock. [...]

[...] Beyond its structure, the song is an emblem of the genre it belongs to also because of its arrangement, that, in line with the typical sound of the West Coast rock of the 70's, mixes acoustic instruments (in this case, acoustic guitars, piano and organ) and electric ones with thorough care for the details of the resulting polyphony and a great harmonic taste. The electric guitar plays embellishments in country-rock style, the acoustic ones do serene *arpeggio*'s, piano intervenes mostly as an element of color with, from time to time, some brief phrases and eventual chord clusters. Organ is used in the manner of the Dylan of '65-'66, in order to create, through a harmonic-melodic substrate made of a few, long notes, the specific connotation Dylan defined as "liquid and mercurial" and to recall a vague sense of spirituality (deriving from the fact that it reminds its function in religious music).

[...] As for the melodic dimension, though I won't go deep in the details, its classicism is rather evident. The line unravels by using the processes of iteration, development and variation that are the foundation of the compositional technique of cultured music and serenely integrates with lyrics' musicality, reflecting their syllabic structure through the correspondence between the value (duration) of the notes and the syllables (mostly one note per syllable). The variations are pretty gradual in each section but they occur with a kind of moderate (classical, indeed) discontinuity at the passage between the different sections, therefore dramatically reflecting lyrics' structure. The final aim of the musical development is, lyrics even suggest it in a metalinguistic way ("Thought out schemes to gain the Mother Land"), going back home, to the Mother Land, that is to say to the tonic chord.

[...] Jackson Browne had a classical music education. Some say that, when he was a child, he was the typical *enfant prodige*. The end of the song (section C') makes us understand that he was already (when he wrote it, at about twenty) a complete and cultured composer. In C' the song reaches its dramatic peak. Its initial melodic phrase ("I'm not trying to tell you that I've seen the plan") is the same as in C, afterwards ("Turn and walk away if you think I am") it is varied, with the result of an inner modulation in the section (when he sings "think"), obtained by using with a different function the same note that, in the closure of B, was a blue note and leading, through another melodic phrase ("But don't think too badly of one who's left holding sand")

and a slightly varied iteration of it (“He's just another dreamer dreamin' 'bout Everyman”), to the closure of the section in a suspension between the tonalities of D major and G major (the SOL, alias “sun”, finally arriving), in the infinite, suspended and cradling alternation G-D with which the song began and now it appears as if refusing to end.

## My City Of Ruins

There's a blood red circle on the cold dark ground and the rain is falling down. The church door's thrown open, I can hear the organ's song but the congregation's gone. My city of ruins. My city of ruins. Now the sweet bells of mercy drift through the evening trees, young men on the corner like scattered leaves. The boarded up windows, the empty streets, while my brother's down on his knees. My city of ruins. My city of ruins. [...] With these hands, with these hands, I pray for the faith, Lord. With these hands, with these hands, I pray for the strength, Lord. With these hands, with these hands. Come on, rise up! Come on, rise up!

We're going to skip the structural analysis and make a preliminary statement about the soul (as in *soul music*), the spirit (as in the *spirituals*) and the ethic (*ethos*). In this song it is the spiritual dimension of African-American music the element symbolizing the momentum to action (*drama*). The action of who must recover from its defeat or get back on the move after a stop.

[...] As a stone rolling on the pavement (“Like A Rollin' Stone”), Springsteen goes even more backwards in the history of American music, even before Dylan and Guthrie, to gospel and spiritual and, in an indirect way, even more backwards, to the catholic liturgical repertoire and to the ancient Greece. Coincidence arousing wonder, the melodic progression of the notes of the bass VIII (that is to say, the I, but higher by an octave)-VII-VI-V-IV, a sort of continuous bass but also an implicit harmonic progression *in toto*, opens the song and constitutes its fundamental mark. It's the opposite progression of the ascending one starting from the same grade, I-II-III-IV-V, of the verse of the seminal song by Dylan, generally considered (with a more than correct estimate, in my opinion) the most valuable and influential rock track of all times.

[...] Therefore, when I say that this song is a game played with matching numbers, I don't intend to be eccentric or bizarre. A game, but of the gambling kind. Substantially speaking, it is always about the same. Rock, popular culture, history, folk, love (and so on and so forth), the spirit and the body, *logos* and *ethos*, the music and the poetry, Apollonian and Dionysian (and so on and so forth) are altogether just one thing, the Human Being and the divine fire that is in him.

The harmonic progression (I major- VI minor, IV major) in the verse of *My City Of Ruins* is the same as the one in *Atlantic City*, from the album NEBRASKA (another

sort of “Anthology of Spoon River” by Bruce).

The Rolling Stones used to sing “*It's only rock' n' roll but I like it*”. “*It's only math but I like it*” is an expression that could be used for music in general. Maybe, here we are, the origin of everything could be there, in mathematics. Of the pulses we receive from the frequencies of musical sounds, of their resonance with our most intimate strings (the natural frequencies of the harmonious and proportionate body of the athlete but, somehow, also those of the deformed ones of the Minotaur [...])

“Come on rise up!.... My city's in ruins”.

3+3+2 is the extraordinary inner rhythm, inside the otherwise ordinary flow of rock's standard 4/4, of this amazing rock ballad. The polyrhythmic recall to a deeper instinct. The organ and the voices burst into a collective, primordial, liberating chorale and the track ends with a tenuous, romantic piano phrase that closes all of it in a classicist style but actually leaves everything suspended and open.