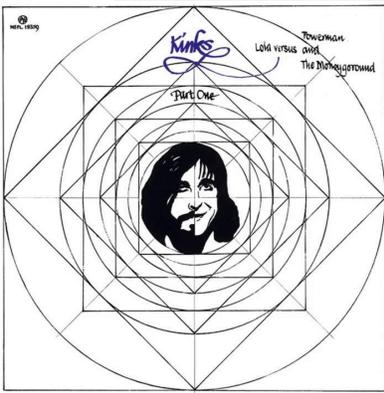


Stranger Tomorrow

Rosa Boshier



The Kinks

"This Time Tomorrow"

Lola Versus Powerman and the Moneygoround, Part One

11/1970

Pye • Reprise

The Kinks' "This Time Tomorrow" drains out of the tin and plastic of my computer speakers, welling up from the depth of Spotify's terrifyingly accurate understanding of my musical tastes, and reminds me that I was once, first and foremost, a fan. I stood—or rather, leaned—front and center for a group of boys that, to my teenage self, epitomized love and art and intrigue. Those boys I knew came wandering out of sunsets, their feathered hair rippling in the hot Santa Ana wind. They were always on the verge of adventure, flicking their lighters, drumming their fingers on their knees or plucking at their guitars, dreaming of places we'd read about in books, from *On the Road* to *This Side of Paradise* to *The Martian Chronicles*. For me, these boys were the books. They were the films. Sexuality and creativity all rolled into one. An instinctive artistry that I admired, yet with cracked souls wide enough for me to nurse the gaps.

I was both mother and muse to these boys who were so anxious to be men. To move off to New York or to San Francisco. Reeds and Claptons and Pages waiting in the rough. 60s spirits trapped in a mountain town that felt like an island, worlds bigger than their bodies swirling around in their heads. They vowed to be anywhere but here. And I saw them there too, walking into the sunset from whence they came, sitars slung across their backs. In my wildest dreams I never thought they'd be the ones who stayed. The ones who never made it out—left behind to smoke weed in their mothers' basements. Their talent, their potential, floating away with their cigarette smoke. These were the boys that could jam for hours in the paradise of an open garage. And we, the fans, sat around in the abandoned lot opposite, laying in the wild grass, feeling like maybe this could be our lives. That life could only have more of this to offer us.

The summer of 2003 we watched live concerts on repeat. We popped in exclusive cut after exclusive cut, watching all of the access material the DVDs had to offer. Hendrix made crotch-sweaty O's around the body of his guitar, winking at girls in flower crowns, their young, supple breasts swinging just below eye level. Robert Plant stripped off his shirt and cat-walked across stage, shaking free his lion's mane. Nestled between my ascot-adorned boyfriend and my excessively bejeweled best friend, we daydreamed aloud of simpler times with good music and strong morals and a band of young artists just like us. But we avoided Woodstock. Though we were born 30 years later, we understood that Woodstock marked the death of The Sixties. After Woodstock, the rose-tinted glasses were lifted from the temples of an entire generation. "Woodstock was a spark of beauty," Joni Mitchell once said, one that was stamped out by the harsh realities of war and economic collapse and the contradictions and dangers of free love. Late at night, when the heat drained from the day, we'd pile into our friend's backyard and talk and play music and write until the early hours of the morning. On the way home I'd lay my head on a friend's shaggy-haired shoulder and imagine our *Almost Famous* future.

Perhaps another appeal of The Sixties was my father's nostalgia. A young painter in Swinging London's hay day, it was a time in his life in which he could stumble into a bar and end up on John Lennon's living room floor at 4 in the morning listening to Ravi Shankar. Or on a plane to Berlin with Bowie. In my father's Sixties, lifelong friendships were solidified within the course of an evening. Everyone from the daughters of duchesses to janitors' sons like my father were powered by ideas that could bend the course of history. In my father's anecdotes, it was an endless stream of attachments, creative collaborations, and ardent trysts. And I wanted it to be that for me.

*This time tomorrow, where will we be?
On a spaceship somewhere,
sailing across an empty sea*

In my mind no other song encompasses two generations of nostalgia more than The Kinks' "This Time Tomorrow"—at once possibility, naïveté, and futurity, ending in a startling cynicism. The lingering bite of WWII and the hint that there is more to the song's message than the Utopia of escape. *This time tomorrow, where will we be?* A line as hopeful as it is fearful. But as teenagers we only registered the positive. We didn't know where we'd be, but we were chomping at the bit to find out. And we were intent on discovery as a group—a tribal togetherness that felt necessary in the conservative enclave we grew up in.

Yet, the price of my stranger tomorrow was to suppress much of my strange. Though a self-proclaimed writer since I was eight, I was never seen as an artist in this circle. In order to keep in good standing with these guys I was required to be a porcelain doll—silent and smooth. Pleasant and affectless. Porcelain dolls did not write sci-fi stories or geek out over Latin American film. They didn't have opinions about current events. Much like our idolized onscreen counterparts, the "Band-Aids," porcelain dolls were there merely to accept rendition after rendition of "Wild Thing" dedicated to them by some wild-eyed pimply musician. To inspire but not partake in creative production.

The boys never asked me about the books I read. They only asked me to hold their hands as the mushrooms kicked in, to call their mothers when the drugs were too much for them to take. For me to be their mothers—cradling their heads, stroking their foreheads, and telling them stories as they stumbled through an acid-induced mental journey. The Velvet Underground or The Beatles or The Doors—all talismans of cultural production built on the backs or under the influence of women and people of color. Morrison had Pamela. Reed had Nico. John had Yoko. In keeping with this warped lineage, I kept my writing practice extracurricular to my social one.

Enter Jenny Lewis. In the wooden box of The Troubadour she seemed larger than life, the rest of Rilo Kiley decorative behind her. It was less the music and more Lewis that moved me. There was something so alluring about being the girl commanding the band instead of gazing up at it. I admired her for holding her own, for *being* the show. She had, has, a raw charisma—those heartbreaker bangs and cascading red hair and a searing sincerity. She let her voice crack. She made cheesy jokes on stage. She allowed herself to be vulnerable and friendly. And she allowed me to believe, that just maybe I too could dive into the depths of making without waiting for approval. I could fumble through my creative urges in the now, however imperfectly they might manifest. I no longer yearned for the past. I hungered for the present.

Slowly, I realized that every one of these boys had tried to take something from me, be it my body or my confidence or my intellectual property. My love for them whittled away as my own sense of self grew. I crept away from the boys and their stages, and the further I went the harder it became for them to accept me as my own creative force, with my own cultural heritage. My references to Magical Realism were either met with silence or jokes about my Colombian family and connections to cocaine. If they overheard me speaking Spanish I was implored to *Speak English*. For me to be a woman and creative and Latina seemed too particular for comprehension. Any attempt to stray from my former porcelain existence was met with ridicule. By the end of my junior year I made my final conversion from hippy to hipster, dropping The Yardbirds and The Stones for Le Tigre, Coco Rosie, and, of course, my beloved Rilo Kiley. Our friend group disbanded due to

drugs or love triangles or both. The once idealistic crew of creative misfits snapped back into bored kids in a suburban town. Our gatherings lost their magic.

But don't get me wrong, when I hear The Kinks I lean in. I think of boys in royal blue corduroy blazers, cigarettes hanging out of their lips, fingers sliding across their guitar frets, young cheeks covered in virgin fuzz. I think of endless summer nights, the smell of tall, dry grass, the sun liquefying above us as we talk about our future selves through the nightfall. But also, I think of myself at that age, in an ultramarine jacket and wild hair, a notebook glued to my hand. I think of everything I wanted to accomplish back then, and that, maybe, it's still within reach. I am reminded of the infinite availability of tomorrow, shiny and new, winking with possibility.