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Texts, Drugs, and Rock 'N' Roll: Easy Rider and the Compilation Soundtrack

Jonathan R. Lee
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

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TEXTS, DRUGS, AND ROCK 'N' ROLL

Easy Rider and the Compilation Soundtrack

► **JONATHAN RHODES LEE, PH.D.** // MUSICOLOGY, FILM STUDIES, POSTSTRUCTURALIST LITERARY THEORY

► PROJECT DESCRIPTION

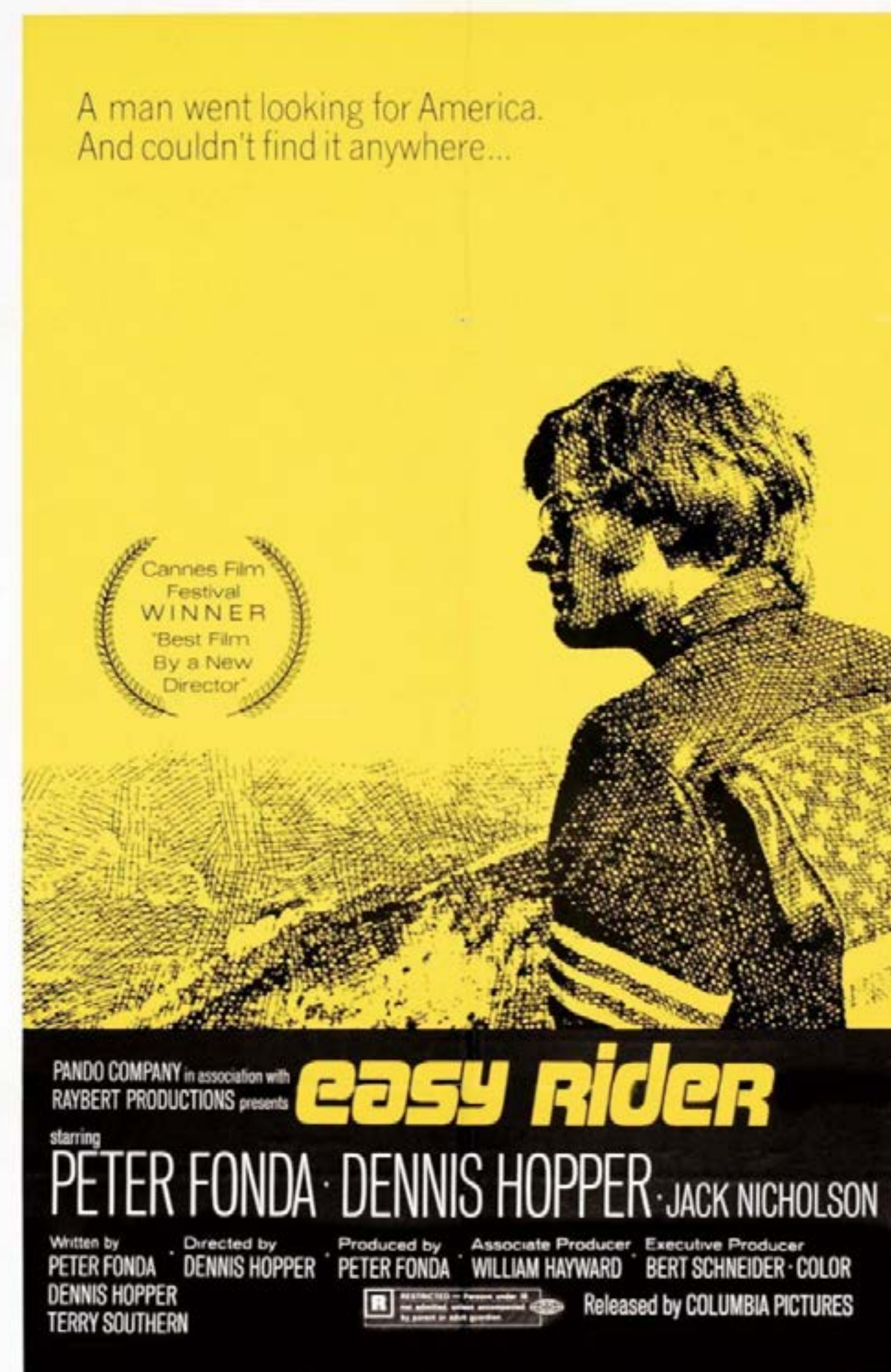
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Of all the New Hollywood films, *Easy Rider* (1969) perhaps most effectively demonstrates the potential complexity of the rock compilation soundtrack. Drawing on concepts from film studies, film musicology, and literary theory, this article discusses how *Easy Rider* demonstrates the compilation soundtrack's potential to generate meanings both inter- and intratextually. The intertextual method of interpreting pop compilation soundtracks looks deeply into the intersection of image, sound, and narrative on a vertical axis, considering the relationship between dialogue/image/plot point and song lyrics/musical style, the ways that the songs on these soundtracks communicate to audiences the thematic or diegetic significance of a given moment, and how these synthetic meanings apply to various characters/situations in the diegesis. Intratextual readings work horizontally to show the cyclical relationships between audiovisual set-pieces and the ways that these relationships clarify or enhance narrative themes. Attention to the intratextual function shows that despite the frequent concern that popular songs can disrupt the integrity of a filmic narrative, popular music soundtracks can in fact feature their own modes of large-scale, structural function. This film's soundtrack allows viewers to experience *Easy Rider* in dual registers; narrative threads connect to other narrative threads, musical set-pieces connect to musical set-pieces, and all of the elements together comprise one audiovisual complex.

► REFERENCES & ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

[Article website, University of California Press](#)



Original marketing poster for *Easy Rider*
Source: www.moviegoods.com

► ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jonathan Rhodes Lee is a musicologist with interests in both eighteenth-century topics (particularly the works of George Frideric Handel) and film music. He has presented his work in various forums, including publications for *Cambridge Opera Journal*, *Eighteenth-Century Music*, *Music and Letters*, *The Journal of Musicology*, the *Händel Jahrbuch*, and A-R Editions. His book, *Film Music in the Sound Era: A Research and Information Guide*, appeared in 2020 with Routledge. Lee is currently Associate Professor of Musicology and director of the Arnold Shaw Popular Music Center at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (asc.unlv.edu)

Active as a performing harpsichordist, Lee also regularly performs as soloist, chamber musician, and in orchestras at home and abroad. He has recorded for the MSR, Navona, and Equilibrium labels. His most recent solo recording, *French Connections*, was released on Navona in December 2021.

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Author's website: www.jonathanrhodeslee.com

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