

# Music - the best religion

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Over the last few decades, people have been moving away from institutional religion, and we are becoming more of a non-religious society. While there is still a heavy influence on our nation by evangelical Christianity, it's no doubt that the amount of non-religious individuals increases with every generation. Religion is synonymous with creating boundaries, setting restrictions, and establishing rules both in the outside world as well as in the minds of the individuals who subscribe to them.

As Michael J. Gilmour showed in his book, music is something that is almost the opposite of this. Music breaks down walls, challenges opinions, and depending on the music, it can allow the consumers to become someone or something else when they are under the influence of it. At the same time, since the 1960s, artists have been using different aspects of religion in their lyrics and music. Even if one were to disregard the lyrics, the connections between religion and music are prevalent everywhere. In music, there is the worshipping of a single figure or group of individuals. The consumers want to get as close as possible to these figures that they worship, but only a small percentage will have the opportunity to interact with them. For the rest of us, they are figures that we worship but will never interact directly with.

There is also ritualistic behavior not much different than what followers of religion practice. Loyal communities are an integral part of both music and religion as well as the conflicts between them. These are just some of the strong similarities between the systems of religion and contemporary music.

Christopher Partridge, who is one of the main scholars on religion and popular culture, explored the ways in which individuals and groups have used music to explore alternative spiritual ideologies. One of the examples

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he used was that of the festivals that took place in the 1960s and how these were environments that aided in the transfer from institutional religion to this new realm.

One of the artists during this era was Jimi Hendrix, and I will use him as a way to explore some of these themes that were introduced in class through lecture as well as Michael J Gilmore's *Call Me the Seeker*. I think Hendrix is a great example of how these artists and musicians are turned into deities by their fans. In this specific case, I think it is worth bringing attention to the fact that he was only mainstream for about four years before eventually dying from the use of barbiturates and the resulting asphyxiation. Similar to religion, after his death, his popularity kept increasing. More and more people were being introduced to his music, and he was gaining an increasing number of followers as time passed.

The 1960s is known for the counterculture and rebellious individuals who were part of it. We can see how the society used rebellious acts against institutional religion, the religion was present in the West. Eastern religion became a medium for this counterculture. We can see this in Hendrix's album *Axis: Bold as Love*. The album cover uses the image of the Hindu god Vishnu, but the head is replaced by Hendrix's. In doing this, it was a way in which alternative forms of religion or spirituality were being injected into American society, one which was looking for anything outside of the normal boundaries which were strong before this movement. This was a period in which people were becoming more globally connected to the outside world as well. While this theme isn't completely related to what we have covered

so far in the course, I believe that this idea is worth exploring. This can be a supplemental explanation as to why religion has been used in music since the 1960s.

In the case of Hendrix and other artists who have used eastern religion as a form of counterculture and rebellion against the society in which they were living in, certain forms of religion or spirituality were used against others. While the use of eastern religion might not have been only attacking western religion, it definitely was part of it. If one were to go back in time and attend a Hendrix concert or even watch one, it is clear that what is taking place is almost a religious experience. Firstly, the people are transported to a different state of mind, whether that be from the drugs or the music, it isn't relevant, they would be in that state of mind for those few hours. Just looking at Hendrix himself, we can see that what was taking place was not just guitar playing. He once said, " music is my religion."

Even when looking at the lyrics of many of his songs, there are direct references to religion. None of them seem to be talking about any specific religion, just a god in general. This seems to be a theme in some music. While many artists are not using certain lyrics regarding Western or Eastern religion, they are using religion in a general sense. I believe that this is something that is also a representation of society as a whole, we are moving away from specific religions and more into the realm of spirituality or non-specific religions.