

# The evolution of alternative rock essay sample

[Art & Culture](#), [Music](#)



### a. Introduction/Overview

A phrase coined by many emerging bands in the early 1980's, 'alternative rock' has become an increasingly more popular term used to describe artists that try to be innately different, yet veer away from the establishment and wish only to play the music they want to play without "selling out". While it isn't as concentrated or specific as other genres like hip hop or classical music, alternative music encompasses a wide variety of artists and songs over decades, most of which could be subcategorized into grunge, metal, punk rock, progressive, new wave, and even mo or folk rock. Alternative rock has fueled the creative spirits of not only artists but fans as well, from beatniks, to non-conformists, all the way up to today's 'hipster nation'. It's nearly impossible to define it as a movement simply because there is no one concrete belief that all artists and supporters share; alternative rock simply focuses on the power of individuality.

### b. Historical Background

Though its popularity heightened in the 80's and continued to remain popular through present day, alternative rock was in fact born in the 1960's alongside many progressive anti-establishment art, music, literature and activism. This began the cultural classification known as "underground music". The seeds of what was to become alternative rock today were sown in this new underground music scene, filled with hippies that rocked out to anything but the ordinary. Most of this music during that time coincided with what was going on with the world - the Vietnam War and the Cold War.

While most was in some way, shape or form political in nature, this music was simply weird. During the 1960's, young people devoted themselves to artists and songs that stood out among the rest. And though legendary bands like The Beatles, as well as American artists like Bob Dylan and Janice Joplin became household names at this point in time, they evolved beside the controversial LSD inspired musicians like The Doors and 13th Floor Elevators. It was these artists that revolutionized the industry by breaking the mold; it was psychedelic rock that gave way to what we now refer to as 'alternative rock'.

Being awfully progressive for its time, psychedelic rock offered a totally new perspective to the use of these so called "mind-expanding drugs" and arguably launched the popularity at the time. Because so many young people enjoyed this music and idolized people like Jim Morrison of The Doors and Jimi Hendrix, the use of such drugs was sensationalized, and this alternative lifestyle was often blindly supported.

Unfortunately, times like these will never get a full consensus on how influential music like this was on the minds of young people and generations of artists to come. There are those that lived it, who swear by spiritual and artistic enhancements these drugs offer, and there are those who might say that all this movement did was breed a doped up army of youths with eclectic tastes in music. Whatever one's standpoint may be, there is absolutely no getting away from the fact that the events leading up to the 60's as well as the creation of LSD and psychedelic rock paved the way for a new contemporary movement in rock 'n roll.

### c. Artist/Movement Profile

Seeing as alternative rock encompasses many genres of music including progressive, new wave, grunge, etc., it is nearly impossible to choose just one that stand out among the rest. Indeed there are several in every generation that stand out and transform people's thinking. It's often been said that everything's been done already; you just need to figure out how to do it differently. That being said, there is one band that most people today associate with modern alternative music: Red Hot Chili Peppers. The band currently consists of founding members, vocalist Anthony Kiedis and bassist Michael "Flea" Balzary along with a longtime member drummer Chad Smith. Guitarist John Frusciante quietly left the band on good terms in late 2008, but on January 2, 2010, Josh Klinghoffer was announced as Frusciante's replacement.

Based out of Hollywood, CA, the Red Hot Chili Peppers have overcome countless trials and tribulations as they dealt with personal issues such as drug addiction and untimely death among band mates, all the while topping the charts and trying to keep their laid back, 'SoCal' persona. Though it may have seemed that the band often appealed to and even promoted the hard-partying, slacker lifestyle, the band branched out as they gained popularity, and proved that they could hook even the sunniest of audiences. Many would even be surprised to hear that the Red Hot Chili Peppers was built from collaboration between Flea and Kiedis during their college years, after performing in a KISS-inspired hard rock group that varied greatly from the sounds of what we now recognize as the Red Hot Chili Peppers.

Together, they found out that Kiedis' lyrics and Flea's music combined perfectly, and took a leap of faith in evolving their sound. After this fateful collaboration, Kiedis and Flea decided on the name and recruited former band mates Hillel Slovak as the guitarist and Jack Irons as the drummer. Finally, they rounded the LA club circuit, pulling stunts that playing these local shows nude (except for tactically placed socks) and making a name for themselves until being signed by EMI Records in 1984, debuting their self-titled album with a new drummer and guitarist, as Irons and Slovak decided to hang back and focus on their original band (a rather foolish decision on their part).

After several notable guitarists, 10 albums produced, and over 53 million sold, the Red Hot Chili Peppers continue to thrive as one of the world's most successful musical groups. Time and time again, since their first self-titled album in 1984, they've continuously succeeded in "doing it differently." Heavy on the bass, RHCP draws much of their influence from funk of the 1970's, rap, California pop, giving them a recognizable, eclectic sound. Being from California, original band mates Kiedis and Flea founded the Red Hot Chili Peppers on what they new and loved, which was their home. While there are many that have come before them who idolized the essence of California, such as the Eagles or the Beach Boys, it was the combination of so many other genres and sounds that helped the Red Hot Chili Peppers gain notoriety.

While not explicitly dark, the Chili Peppers often centered their music on the many vices of California, and looked at the sins and the sinners lurking

around every palm tree that the Beach Boys failed to point out. In songs such as ' Californication', from the album Stadium Arcadium, they sing about how Hollywood isn't all flashing bulbs and innocent fame. Lyrics in the song include, " Space may be the final frontier/But it's made in a Hollywood basement" and, " earthquakes are to a girl's guitar/ They're just another good vibration/And tidal waves couldn't save the world/From Californication".

Though clearly a product of this volatile environment they are describing in this song, it is surely interesting to see the Red Hot Chili Peppers offer a different perspective on this land dipped in gold. It is seemingly through their contempt towards the corruption of their beloved tinseltown that they reach ordinary audiences. By showing they are disconnected from Hollywood big wigs, cocky directors and a business that is nearly impossible to break into, there is an air of realism that most superstars simply cannot grasp. And while the Red Hot Chili Peppers are far from being an indie or garage band any longer, they appeal to similar audiences and have always remained true to themselves.

#### d. Artwork analysis

The Red Hot Chili Peppers, as stated previously, as a unique blend of many genres such as funk, punk rock, pop, rap and California-inspired hard rock. If you've ever listened to the Red Hot Chili Peppers, you'd know that it is almost impossible to describe their sound simply because there is no one defining feature. The only analogy that would remotely make sense is when a child scribbles with every different color crayon on a piece of paper; except when she is done with her scribbling, a masterpiece emerges. For lack of a

better word, the Red Hot Chili Peppers is this masterpiece. While their sounds cannot be described as 'beautiful' in a traditional sense, it is their ability to create unparalleled and unusual harmonies that sets them apart from other bands.

One of the great things about the Red Hot Chili Peppers, as well as many other bands that have been around for a long time, is that their sound has evolved over time. Not only have they become more comfortable with themselves over the years, they've settled into their thrones as kings in the contemporary music scene. This day in age, no one wants to listen to music that talks about living in a perfect world because we don't. The world wants music we can relate to and that's what the Red Hot Chili Peppers have provided us with in songs like 'Californication' as well as 'Otherside' and countless others that are artistic representations of being human, moving on, and living in an imperfect world.

The band is often known for and recognized by its logo, which is a simple, thick red asterisk with 8 points. While I wish I could go on and on about its deeper meaning or how it was based off of some sort of ancient symbols, Flea reluctantly admits in an interview that the asterisk was simply a spur of the moment decision on the bands part. Although it certainly did its job of sticking in the minds of audiences, the only thing the asterisk represents is the millions of dollars the band has made over the past 26 years.

All this being said, Red Hot Chili Peppers is only one band in a sea of so many other greats, as well as new and emerging alternative rock bands everywhere from New York City to Los Angeles. Over the past few years,

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alternative rock has undoubtedly become my favorite type of music. I was never one for pop music, and I especially detested the ever-popular hip-hop scene; it just wasn't for me. Being musically inclined all my life, I have a great appreciation for the previous generation and how the music of the 60's and 70's shaped the music I grew up with. I also learned that while 'new' didn't always mean 'better', 'old' didn't always mean 'best'.

And in short, this was the driving concept behind the now very popular alternative music scene. What makes this musical movement so eternal is that new, creative minds are always finding new ways of reinventing the music that inspires them. Such can be said about local artists just starting out, like 20 year old Joe Villafane, lead singer of the Long-Island based band Allies. When asked who he found most influential in this movement, he too mentioned the Red Hot Chili Peppers, as well as Nirvana, Incubus and Led Zeppelin, and that people were drawn to them because, "they stayed true to themselves, their bizarre and strange selves. I believe those bands caught on because people are attracted to weird."

Ultimately, I agree. Each musician's individuality and creativity is what gets them noticed, rather than "selling out" which has caused many to shun other bands such as Weezer, Green Day and Red Jumpsuit Apparatus. While on the other end of the spectrum, once completely unknown bands such as Fun. and Young the Giant have reached stardom over the past few years due to their overtly different sound, good publicity, and in this day in age, a hell of a lot of luck.

e. Conclusion



With such a wide following spanning over several generations, and with so many different types of music to account for, it's just about impossible to judge the success of alternative music. What can be said, however, is that due its variety, it can appeal to just about everyone, and that it preaches the importance of both individuality and community simultaneously.

Through the lyrics, and the "can-do" attitude the music promotes individual thought, and the idea that if you don't like something, complain about it (or in this case, sing about it). But at the same time, the alternative music spawned a new era in an of itself, which focused on the fan base of all artists, from huge bands like the ones previously mentioned to tiny garage bands that no one's heard of. The music can bring people together in a much simpler way, where the loyalty of your fans defines your musical identity and is ultimately what motivates you to keep on playing. Rock on.

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Picture 1. This is a popular magazine from that time period showing psychedelic artists such as Grateful Dead and Janis Joplin.

Picture 2. John Frusciante (pictured) was one of the Chili Peppers' most well known guitarists.

Picture 3. The Red Hot Chili Peppers' famous logo.