

# The emergence of the psychedelic experience music essay



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When someone hears the word psychedelic, many different things come to mind. Certain drugs, bands, styles, genres, and art work can all be considered psychedelic; but what does that mean? The word “psychedelic” comes from a Greek word meaning “soul-manifesting” and in a way, it kind of makes sense. Many people believe that when they have a psychedelic experience, they learn things about themselves and their minds that they never knew before that may “awaken their soul”. What one would consider a psychedelic experience most often includes hallucinations, changes in perception, mysticism, and a heightening of the senses. These experiences open and expand the depths of the mind in creative and sometimes frightening ways. However, it is hard to deny the impact that psychedelic drugs had on some of the most popular music in American culture.

Psychedelic music was created to mimic the experiences one would have on a psychedelic drug with the unique use of sounds, lights, and lyrics.

Psychedelic music emerged in the 1960's when jazz, blues, rock, and folk musicians began experimenting with many psychedelic drugs such as LSD (acid), salvia, magic mushrooms, ecstasy, and other less common Psychedelics. Due to the massive influence of peace

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and love in the sixties, the music that reflected this attitude had an enormous impact on the culture. Everyone began protesting, giving speeches, holding anti-war seminars, and using drugs. When it came to the music that everyone listened to, it was all part of the psychedelic genre. The psychedelic vibe began to take off in the folk scene when a band called the “

13th Floor Elevators” started advertising themselves as a Psychedelic rock band in 1965. After this happened, many other bands and musicians started using the term to describe themselves and their music. The Beatles, The Byrds, Pink Floyd, Jimi Hendrix, and Led Zeppelin are just a few of the names that made hit songs and albums that were at the top of the charts not only in this genre of music, but in popular music all over the country. The Beatles “Magical Mystery Tour” and Jimi Hendrix’s “Are You Experienced?” are just two primary examples of the impact psychedelics had on a couple of the most recognized musicians at the time and who are even considered legends in music today. Towards the 1970’s, psychedelic music began to go downhill with LSD becoming illegal in the late 1960’s. However, it was not too long after this that it started to become popular again. In the late 1970’s and early 1980’s, the music started to rise for a second time. Although the music still was not as big as it was when it first emerged in the 1960’s, it was still the music of choice by many musicians and listeners.

Psychedelic music has many distinct characteristics that make it significantly different from any other genre in music. Songs are usually very long and strung out with many instrumental solos that can make it unclear when a song starts and ends. It is not uncommon for a song to turn into a twenty-minute jam session on stage. Like jazz, psychedelic music often uses a lot of improvisation. The music that these bands play can be looked at as more of an experience than an actual song, so the typical verse-chorus form is not used very often. Psychedelic music

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has very complex song structures, key and time signature changes, and melodies. While many of these bands only use standard instruments like the guitar, bass, keyboard, and drums, they use unique effects to make them sound psychedelic. Other bands incorporate exotic instrumentation like the sitar and table; just to name a couple of examples. Guitarists in these types of bands do not stand on stage and strum chords; rather they use feedback and fuzz boxes to play the guitar in less common ways. They use studio effects such as panning, phasing, and long delay loops. More often than not, while the musicians are playing, they have a light show going on either behind them or throughout the entire room. These light shows include various bright colors that change shape and color, enhancing the feel of the psychedelic experience.

Ever since music began recording, the music industry and drugs have gone hand in hand. It is not uncommon for your favorite musician or artist to have experimented with psychedelics or any other form of drug. In fact, the majority of the popular music today is based on the use of drugs even when most people do not realize it. Music throughout history has always been heavily influenced by the trends and politics that were relevant at the time the music was created. It has always been used as a way to tell stories about what is going on in its time and the 1960's were no exception to this trend. With all of the protests, demonstrations, and anti-war organizations in the sixties, it is no wonder people started to turn to music and drugs to ease the pain of knowing the tragedies that were going on in Vietnam. Like other musical genres, psychedelic music has represented an era in history that has given us a good idea about what our culture was in the 1960's. Economics,

politics, and the life styles of the people at this time, were all shown in this unique style of music. Because of this, music has always been an art form that teaches us more about history, the world around us, and more importantly, it teaches us about ourselves.

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(Part 2)

On February 12th, I decided to go see my friend Zac's band, Genius Christ, play for the first time at The Lighthouse Lounge in Phoenixville. Before they even started playing, I could tell that they were a psychedelic band because of the lightshow that they had set up before coming out on stage. All of the walls near the stage were covered with large white cloths so that it was easy to see the pictures and designs of the light show. The room was all dark except for the colors coming from the projector. They had music hooked up to big speakers from an iPod that sounded very mystical before they came out on stage.

When they finally came out and started playing their first song, it was called " Falling Asleep on LSD". Their first song lasted at least seven minutes long and had a lot of cool, trippy effects and solos just like the rest of the songs that they played afterwards. Each song had its own distinct whimsical feel to it and made me feel like I was in a dream.

Genius Christ consists of a bass player, drummer, keyboardist, saxophone player, and a guitarist who is also the vocalist. The vocalist's singing style varied not only from song to song, but throughout each song as well. In one

of the songs that they played, the vocalist began singing normally, then started screaming, and then started rapping toward the end of the song. The bass player and the keyboardist used many unique techniques to play their instruments, while the drummer just seemed to play very lightly.

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At the end of their performance, they started handing out CD's to everyone in the audience and told us about their next few shows that were coming up. Overall, the experience was awesome. All of the musicians were extremely talented and their solos were complex and exceptional. I was very impressed with the entire show that they put on. Their concert was not like every other concert that I usually go to. It was not a typical rock show where the lyrics are predictable and the musical talent consists of a basic chord progression. They became my favorite band after this performance.