

The relationship between music and religion

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Music and pop culture are interchangeable. Most people listen to music in some, shape or form in their everyday life. A major population of the world is deeply connected to music emotionally. Hip-hop emerged in the late 70s by the African-Americans' as a way to express their oppressive experience. They channeled their anger and violence into empowerment and creatively expressing themselves by music. Now, hip-hop and rap music have risen to massive mainstream success.

Music in itself is very broad and it allows people to creatively express themselves. Many religions use music as a means to express devotion. For example Shabad Gurbani - meaning the word of the guru (Sikhism), Bhajan in Hinduism, Carols and Church choir. So, the question I would like to discuss here: is music religion or is music a religion on its own? It's very debatable but music has been an integral part of people's life. Star Wars and Disney fans have a religion based on those franchises, so music can be faith as well. Music has been praised by religious believers as being god's voice and also condemned it for being devil's cacophony. Many ceremonies throughout various religions are conducted by the means of music or involve the use of music (azaan in Islam, sacrifice, and aarti in Hinduism).

But music exists in many forms and some forms of been criticized by religious leaders and speakers. A lot of hip-hop and rap music uses sexual and vulgar lyrics which many religions consider to be sinful. Some kind of secular music is considered the devil's voice for certain Christians. Hip-hop and rap music because of its unorthodox and usual ways (break dancing, graffiti, pop, and lock) has been critiqued by most religions.

Even though many priests consider vocalization of religious text and scriptures being negative (Qur'anic vocalization), many others believe recitation of music is the best way to connect with god and discuss music in only the highest form of praise. Most prayers in Hinduism are conducted by the recitation of verses and music. It is believed to be the highest form of spiritual fulfillment. "The aim and final end of all music should be none other than the glory of God and the refreshment of the soul." — Johann Sebastian Bach. There is a theory that just by listening to the choir, people would get edification even without knowing the language. In Sikhism, the scriptures are based on melodies. There are 38 ragas based on the holy scriptures. Therefore, people use music in various ways to strengthen their relationship with God. The Anglican religion emulates its royal roots and its musical practices by performing psalms through English classical music.

Similarly, hip-hop and rap music has cultural and religious tie-ups with the African-American culture. Rap music is the creatively rhyming and improvised narration of the artist's thoughts and lyrics are based on some reality. The subjects are based on the grim reality of young African-Americans. The rise of hip-hop in the main-stream and pop-culture has been exceptional in the past 3 decades.

African-American DJ's like Kool Here and Afrika Bambaataa created innovative beats for neighborhood parties and community centers. This laid the foundation for hip-hop music as it drew heavily. Then, Run- DMC's 'Walk This Way' paved their way to commercial success. There have been changes from its original form. Then we had the rise of "gangsta" rap (it is about the Latin, Hispanic and African-American street youth. N. W. A (Niggaz With <https://assignbuster.com/the-relationship-between-music-and-religion/>

Attitude) with their gritty, street attitude released their 1988 album, *Straight Outta Compton* sold more than two million copies. This opened the door for many West-coast gangsta rap artists. Many older artists question the new artists as they think that they're deviating from the original concept and the rappers are more concerned about showing off cars and women.

The music world has changed drastically. It went from recorded music to vinyl to e-track to cassette to CD and now its all-digital. Music in the pop-culture has shifted dramatically over the years. From rock dominance in the 60s through the 80s. The "rock stars" became more than just a musical act, they became personas that people wanted to emulate hence the term "Rockstar's" was coined.

Today, we can say that the rock has been replaced by hip-hop and rap music. A quote from John Lennon in an interview in 1966 "Christianity will go. It will vanish and shrink. I needn't argue about that; I'm right and I'll be proved right. We're more popular than Jesus now, I don't know which will go first - rock 'n' roll or Christianity". Rock music has seen a massive decline from the 90s to the current era. Hip-hop has risen at the expense of rock music. Rappers influence how we dress, how we speak and how we act. There are many parallels between hip-hop and religion. Hip-hop music is a main-stay in the contemporary world.

Just like religion, music helps identify and attach oneself. Symbolism is very important in religion as we attach meanings to religious symbols. Symbolism in music is very important. People attach meanings to artists and music. Holy symbols and other religious things are considered sacred. This can be

compared with the music paraphernalia. Music CDs, cassettes and other merchandise are collected and considered sacred.

Religion is a foundation for individuals through which they lay the foundation for their life. Music has a similar effect on many people's life. The effect of music on people's lives is almost as important as religion in today's world. Most religious people consider and attach themselves to groups. That can also be found in music as most people attach themselves to a certain genre. Religion and music have a direct impact on how people react and behave. They shape the thought process as we are taught that religion is a means to connect with god. Music influences the way we act or behave. Many times, people might listen to a certain song and behave a certain way.

Faith in music is growing stronger today. We live vicariously through artists. Music is also very dynamic and the lyrics can be compared to the gospel and sermons as we memorize it.

Religion is all about faith and attaching oneself to spiritual and supernatural power. Music, in the same way, gives meaning and purpose to us. We spiritually connect with the rhythm. Blues are lived experiences. The blues recognize that black people have been oppressed by white people. Richard Wright calls for hope the "endemic capacity to live". The hope that black people could sing the blues to express their joys and sorrows. Hip-hop and rap music has a violent, angry and destructive image in the mainstream media.

However, many artists claim that hip-hop is a force for a positive change and expresses a spiritual, peaceful and inclusive message. There are many <https://assignbuster.com/the-relationship-between-music-and-religion/>

parallels between religion and hip-hop. One important parallel is 'truth-telling'. Hip-hop is informative and serves an important function in telling how it is. It allows people to tell how they feel about something.

It references many things going on in the contemporary world. It addresses issues that aren't generally discussed in the media. This feature is a way to bring a lot of people with a similar thought process together, just like in religion, we get in unison for prayer. Hip-hop brings together people that have faced the same oppression and relate to those issues. For example, the gesture of putting your hands in the air to evoke a response by the audience. It builds a following like a 'cult'.

We dress, think, act a certain way. Hip= hop gives the message of inclusiveness to people. People want to be included and be a part of the group. For example. the 'goth culture', It began in the early 1980s as a subset of the UK punk scene. It was derived directly from the punk rock genre as a subculture where teenagers and young adults channel their moodier side and wear heavy eye makeup. This scene is associated with music festivals, private meetings, and night-life clubbing. It transcends more than just music; the goth subculture is associated with fashion and aesthetics. The gothic style includes wearing darker makeup, black hair. Even when goth was reaching its lowest point, the seeds for its resurrection were already been sown.

Today, rock is got but rap is goth too, TV and movies are goth, fashion's goth. Even social media is goth. This brings up another parallel of symbolism. We dress up as per our culture and religion. We should note that hip-hop

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originally was an alternative to violence by gangs. “ Hip-hop and rap have always been spiritual”. African Bambaataa and DJ Kool Here channeled their anger into innovative and artistic expression (Malcolm, interview, July 12, 1997). Hip-hop and rap are misacted and wrongly shown in the media and mainstream. Other findings from the Guerrero interview highlight how hip-hop and rap are spiritual. He mentions that he takes rap seriously.” It’s all I think of”. He mentions that being a rapper is like being with god. It gives you a purpose just like religion. It allows connecting with God (Guerrero, interview, August 6, 1997). Celebrities in music have taken a big place. Many artists have become bigger the art form itself. “ Hip-hop is not the music: hip-hop is the culture. The music is rap music”. (Paris King, interview, July 3, 1997).

Is Music a future religion of the world in the contemporary world? Music just like other religions brings people together and is universal. Music, in general, is massive and hip-hop is just a genre. We’re approaching a time where music could be considered a religion in the future. Even though there’s a slow decline in religion, it’s nowhere close to dying. The main features of religion have been attracted towards the mainstream and pop culture. The impact of music on people is humungous and it’s only going get bigger in the future. Not only music, other factors of the mainstream popular culture like sports, movies, have a very big impact on people’s lives and are changing the way people perceive themselves and the world. These features and subcultures within the contemporary world are rising as alternate religion choices.

I would like to conclude by saying that, music is definitely one of the dynamic future world religions and so is everything else in popular culture.