

Use and history of song backmasking music essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Each one of us has his/her favorite song, different bands, and different genres. And upon listening to music, it gives us inspiration, relaxes our minds and let us release our emotions and tensions. But would you believe that in some music we hear and every song that we sing, there lies a hidden message that lies within its lyrics and sound. And the process of discovering those things is called Backward Masking or usually referred as Backmasking. It is done by playing a song reversely or reading the lyrics backward.

A. History of Backmasking

Song Backmasking began in 1966 when the band, Beatles used it in recording their album, Revolver (Sullivan, 1987). Album tracks like “ Tomorrow Never Knows”, “ I’m Only Sleeping” and “ Rain” were the songs that have used techniques of musique concrète in recording (Mugan, 2006). “ Musique Concrète is an avant-garde form of electronic music which involves editing together fragments of natural and industrial sounds; and the concurrent spread of the use of tape recorders in recording studios”(White, 2007). After the Beatles used backmasking, artists in time also used it for enhancing the both analog and digital recording of their tracks, by producing comedic and satiric effect. Some artists used backmasking to censor some words and phrases for clean release of sounds (Sullivan 1987).

II. Uses of Backmasking

A. Satanic Backmasking

Satanic Backmasking involved classic rock songs, but composers of these songs denied any intent to promote Satanism. Some bands use Satanic

imagery just for commercial use, one of these is the trash metal band, Slayer. The band used it in their 1985 album “ Hell Awaits” (UGO Networks, 2009), in that album a deep backmasked voice chants repeatedly “ Join us”. But the band’s vocalist, Tom Araya said that they used it just for “ solely for effect” (Hellqvist, 1998). Also the band, Cradle of Filth used Satanic Imagery, and released a song entitled “ Dinner at Deviant’s Palace”, that song consists weird sounds and reverse reading of the Lord’s Prayer (Corbin).

B. Subliminal Messages

Fundamentalist Christian groups said that Satan use music to influence people with the use of Subliminal Messages. Subliminal messages backmasked into rock music influence its listeners to commit crime (Pastor Gary Greenwald). In 1982, Minister Jacob Aranza wrote a book entitled “ Backward Masking Unmasked”, in that book, it explains how backmasking is used to open the subconscious mind and introduce its listeners to Satanism and drugs (Holden, 1983). “ The subconscious mind is being successfully affected by the repetition of beat and lyrics being affected through a subliminal message” (Mills, 1981).

B1. Influence of Subliminal Messages

Because of these subliminal messages, crimes had been committed. Serial killer Richard Ramirez, said that AC/DC music and he specified that the song “ Night Prowler” on “ Highway to Hell” provoked him to commit murder (Watkins). David John Oates, a reverse speech advocate said that the song “ Highway to Hell” contains backmasked message “ I’m the law”, “ my name is Lucifer” and “ she belongs in hell” (Von Ulrich, 1997). Angus Young of AC/DC

<https://assignbuster.com/use-and-history-of-song-backmasking-music-essay/>

stated that “ You didn’t need to play (the album) backwards, because we never hid (the messages). We’d call an album Highway to Hell , there it was right in front of them” (Young and Young, 2004). In 1990, two men in Nevada committed suicide because of the songs of a British heavy metal band, Judas Priest. The lawsuit of their family stated that the 1978 album Stained Class contained a hidden messages , including a forward subliminal message “ Do it” in the song “ Better By You, Better Than Me”. The judge dismissed the case due lack of sufficient evidence of Judas Priest placement of subliminal message on the album (Vokey). The members of the Judas Priest stated that if they insert subliminal messages in their song, all of their fans have died and instead of doing that, they would prefer to insert a subliminal command “ Buy more of our records” (Van Taylor).

C. Backmasking used for critical and too explicit message

Another use of song backmasking is for critical or too explicit messages in a soundtrack. Frank Zappa is one example of artists who used backmasking to avoid critical or too explicit message. He used it in his song “ Hot Poop” from his album, “ We’re Only in It for the Money” released in 1968. The side A of the album contains a backmasked message “ Better look around before you say you don’t care.../ Shut your f... king mouth ’bout the length of my hair.../ How would you survive / If you were alive / Shitty little person? ” . The verse originally came from the song “ Mother People”, and was censored by Verve Records, so Zappa edited it, he reversed it, and insert in his album as “ Hot Poop” (Pacholski).

D. Backmasking used for Aesthetics

Another use of backmasking is for aesthetics, which means “ to enhance the meaning of a track” (Blecha). During the subliminal message trial of the band Judas Priest, its lead vocalist, Rod Halford admitted the recording of words “ In the dead of the night, love bites” backwards in the song “ Love Bites” that came from the album “ Defenders of Faith” that was released in 1984. In an interview, he was asked why he recorded the message, Halford answered that “ When you’re composing songs, you’re always looking for new ideas, new sounds (Zwerin, 1999). Related from this technique is to reverse a whole instrumental track. Vocalist of the band Beatles, John Lennon wanted to do it in their song “ Rain” but their producer, George Martin and bandmate, Paul McCartney disagree with him and cut the backward section to 30 seconds (Stevens, 2002).

E. Backmasking used for Humorous and Parody message

Backmasking is also used for hiding comedic or parodical message backwards in a song. In 1966, the B-side of Napoleon XIV ‘ s single “ They’re Coming to take me Away Ha-Haaa!” is a reverse version of the record entitled “ aaaH-aH, yawA em ekat ot gnimoC er’yeht”(Anonymous). Pink Floyd puts a backmasked message in the song “ Empty Spaces” from 1979’s “ The Wall”, “ Congratulations. You have just discovered the secret message. Please send your answer to Old Pink, care of the Funny Farm, Chalfont.../Roger! Carlyne’s on the phone! /Okay. This message refers to Syd Barrett, the former lead singer of the band who is thought to have suffered nervous breakdown years earlier (Patterson).

F. Backmasking used for Censorship

Backmasking is also used for censorship. It is used to censor words and phrases deemed inappropriate on radio edits and clean album releases. One example of this is The Fugees' clean version of the album "The Score" it contains various backmasked profanities (Nelson, 1998), when the album is played backwards, the censored words are clearly heard in the backward gibberish (Anonymous, 2006). For example, the word "shit", after it was backmasked it would give a sound "ish", as a result "ish" became a euphemism for the word "shit" (Rader, 2002).

III. Artists that were accused using Backmasking

According to Blecha, Arar, Poundstone, Deusner, Tetley and Searcey these are the artists who used backmasking: Led Zeppelin, The Beatles, Pink Floyd, Electric Light Orchestra, Queen, Styx, AC/DC, Judas Priest, The Eagles, The Rolling Stones, Jefferson Starship, Black Oak Arkansas, Rush, Britney Spears and Eminem. Electric Light Orchestra or commonly called as "ELO" was accused of hiding satanic backmasked message in their album, "Elorado" that was released in 1974, the song entitled "Elorado" was said to contain the message "He is the nasty one / Christ, you are infernal / It is said we're dead men / Everyone who has the mark will live" (Poundstone, 1983). Way back 1981, Styx was also accused of hiding a backmasked satanic message "Satan move through our voices" on their song "Snowblind" from their album "Paradise Theatre" (Holden, 1983). James Young, guitarist of the Styx, called the issue rubbish and stated that, "If we want to make a statement, we'll do it in a way that people can understand us and not in a way where you have to go out and buy a \$400 tape player to understand us" (Hoekstra, 1983).

The famous of all is the “ Stairway to Heaven”, 1971 song of the band, Led Zeppelin, the backward playing of a portion of the song results to a message “ Here’s to my sweet Satan” (Milner). The recording company, Swan Song Records gives a statement regarding the song, “ Stairway to Heaven”, they said that “ Our turntables only play in one direction-forwards” (Davis, 2007). And in an interview Robert Plant, vocalist of the band, Led Zeppelin denied the accusation, he said that “ To me it’s very sad, because ‘ Stairway To Heaven’ was written with every best intention, and as far as reversing tapes and putting messages on the end, that’s not my dea of making music” (Considine, 1983).

IV. Comments of Society regarding the song Backmasking

Christian Groups

Christian websites have stated that backmasking is widely used to promote Satanism (Robinson). Dial-the-Truth Ministries, the web page of the Albama group argues for the satanic backmasking that lies in the song, “ Stairway to Heaven” of Led Zeppelin saying that the contains a message, “ It’s my sweet Satan ... Oh I will sing because I live with Satan” (Watkins). Bible Believers, an Australian Christian group , quoted a statement from Backward Masking Unmasked, a book written by Jacob Aranza, about William Yarroll’s proposal regarding the psychological effect of music to the subconscious:

“ In the base of our brain, there is a check valve commonly known as Reticular Activating System. The left side of our brain is logical while the right side is creative, if the left side of our brain cannot decode the meaning

of the strange word or phrase, the right side which is the creative one takes over and the message is acknowledge and stored”.

Parent Music Resource Center

The Parent Music Resource Center is a committee formed by the American Government in 1985. Its main purpose is to increase parental control to the music selected by the children which may trigger violence and sexual suggestive (Anonymous).

Dr. Joe Stuessy testified to the United States Congress at PMRC in 1985:

“ Lyrics in some heavy metal music may be converted to subliminal, sometimes lower tracks are mixed with louder tracks and these lower tracks are heard by the subconscious mind and not the conscious the process of doing this is called backmasking. There is a disagreement between experts regarding the effect of subliminal. We need more research on that.”