

The rapid evolution of rock music



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Rock Music & its Rapid Evolution

Introduction

Music has been with man since the dawn of time. Every beat or sound can some way be considered as a form of music. Dating back to early man music could have been something as simple as the soothing sound of a waterfall or a tree swaying with the wind or a wild animal running through a forest.

Today music is so diversified and so engrained in our lives that practically every child or teenager & even an adult has a vast list of songs that they might listen to on their mp3 players.

There are many varied branches of music existing today. These branches have now expanded to encompass everything from the tribal beats to anything that comes out of a synthesizer. And although we find music in many forms today, I'm sure the purists would disagree with what the youth of today call great music. Now-a-days it seems the search is on for the "in music". Music that's making everybody feel good now and which is discarded in a heartbeat once something better comes along. So what is it that has made rock music go so steady all these years?

The reason why I have chosen Rock music for my seminar paper topic is that, I truly am very passionate about this genre of music. Rock Music or Rock as it is so called is vastly misunderstood by people, most of whom simply associate it with negative stereotypes like drug addiction, alcoholism, violence, sexual abuse, demonic control and other vices. One cannot blame people for having such misconceptions about Rock since over the years many of the famous Rock artists have come to be known mainly for their drug addiction and other outrageous behaviour under the influence of

alcohol and chemical substances. However it is important to understand that one must separate the artist from his music and not pass unnecessary judgment on the music just based on the vices of the artist.

Another misconception is that rock is only drums and guitar, when that is only the public face of Rock. There is a host of other instruments that are key elements to rock music as a whole, other than just guitar and percussion.

Rock Music – History & Origins

I would now like to begin with the History of Rock music. Where did it originate? What are its roots? How has it evolved along the years? What is the scenario at present?

There are several views as to where exactly the Rock genre got up and going. And many believe that Rock originated in the west with the dawn of Rock & Roll by Elvis Presley. However that is far from the case. It all started off during the post-war urbanization of America. The popular music of the late 1940s included country music, folk music, the blues, rhythm and blues (known as R&B), jazz and classical music. Basically rock music hails from a blend of various popular music genres at that time in the United States of America. Rock music started off in the late 1940s when people wanted to move out from the slow beat jazz music and the slow electrified blues music to a much faster beat & rhythm filled tune at that time. The rock sound is believed to have primarily originated with the guitar. It is believed that the existing guitar tunes used in blues music was soon blending in with other forms of music like jazz, classical music, folk music and other popular forms of music existing back then. All this led to the birth of Rock music as a

separate genre of music which back then came to be known as Rock n Roll towards the early 1950's.

Around that time i. e. the late 1940's to the early 1950's Rhythm and Blues (R&B) musicians mainly concentrated on the black audience. However later onwards musicians started playing for a multi-racial audience. These musicians also targeted the newer forms or blends of music towards this audience. Later on these same fast beat blends of R&B and the blues etc came to be coined as ' Rock n Roll'.

“ It is believed that in 1951 in a town in Cleveland, Ohio in USA a musician by the name of Alan Freed is said to have began playing a new form of R&B music for a multi-racial audience & is believed to have first used the phrase ' Rock ' N' Roll' to describe his music.” Source: Icons of Rock – Scott Schinder with Andy Schwartz & Encyclopaedia Britannica – Rock Music.

Rock Music – Evolution

Rock music is believed to be one of those genres of music that has evolved very rapidly over the past 50 to 60 years. Its rapid evolution has been witnessed mainly over the last 50 years. It all started with good old Rock n Roll in the 1950's.

This later evolved in the 1960's which was considered as a Golden Era for Rock music. Rock took a totally different turn with the British invasion of rock by the Beatles. This was later followed by what came to be known as Surf music in America which was a mix of the catchy rock n roll n the hip and happening Beatles music. The Beatles music also led to a new form of music that was called as the hippy and psychedelic rock music.

In the 1970's which came to be known as the memorable years evolved different forms of rock music such as Hard Rock, Punk Rock & also Pop Rock.

The 1980's witnessed a change in the band members' hair styles. This era also was famous for what was called as hair bands. It included styles of rock such as punk rock & funk rock. It led to the evolution of Heavy Metal. Bands used to wear tight leather pants and sported insane long hairdos.

The 1990's showed a completely new and insane evolution of rock. It gave newer forms of rock such as Grunge Rock & Alternative Rock. It gave the revolutionary guitar distortion & feedback.

Many of the genres from the 1950's onwards till the 1999's are still well known today. Most of the bands in those eras are still popular today. Many of today's bands still play the different styles of rock music. Some of them even make remakes of those songs using modern day styles and instruments. The later half of 2000 also witness something that very well came to be known as fusion music. It involved bringing together classical music (Western or Indian) and blending it in with modern day rock music. This style today is very popular especially in our country among our Indian youth that have blended the Indian classical instruments very smoothly with instruments like the guitar, keyboard, percussion, etc.

The 1950's

The 1950's gave rise to the Youth culture. It faced problems such as racial tensions & the advent of the Cold War. This first saw the advent of Rock n Roll with great artists like Chuck Berry, Elvis Presley, Little Richard, Jerry Lee Lewis, The Shadows, Buddy Holly, Bo Diddley, Bill Haley & the Comets, Gene

Vincent, the Everly Brothers, and Carl Perkins, among many others. These were considered to be the first wave of Rock n Rollers.

Rock and roll in its earliest stage could have been described as just blues with a few electric guitar tunes attached to it. In its purest form, Rock & Roll was as simple as three chords, a strong yet insistent guitar back beat, and a catchy melody. Early rock & roll was drawn from sources primarily including blues, R&B, and country, but also gospel, traditional pop, jazz, and folk. These genres were combined together in a simple, blues-based song structure that was fast, danceable, and catchy.

Rockabilly emerged in the mid 1950's. It is simply a mix of rock and roll, country music, blues, and a little jazz too. It was a fundamental music genre of the 50's.

The fathers or founders of Rock n Roll came to be known as Bill Haley, Elvis Presley, Little Richard & Chuck Berry. Their music revolutionized the music industry and later gave way to new forms of rock music in the decades to follow. Even in today's times their music is still very popular.

Rockabilly was popularized by white singers like Elvis Presley, Carl Perkins & Jerry Lee Lewis who mainly concentrated on the country roots of the music. The Popular hits recorded around that time were "That's All Right (Mama)" – Elvis Presley, "Heartbreak Hotel" – Elvis Presley, "Rock Around the Clock" – Bill Haley & the Comets, "Folsom Prison Blues" – Johnny Cash, "Blue Suede Shoes" – Carl Perkins.

Another popular form of Rock n Roll in the 1950's was called the ' Doo Wop'. It emphasized on multi-part vocal harmonies and meaningless backing lyrics & supported with light instrumentation. Its origins were African American vocal groups like the Inkspots & the Mill Brothers. Famous bands of this form of music were The Orioles, The Ravens and The Clovers, that used a strong element of traditional gospel music in their songs. The great hits included " The Great Pretender" – The Platters, " Yakety Yak" – The Coasters & " Yes Sir, That's my Baby" – The Clovers along with many others.

Later on during the 1950's Elvis Presley came to be known as the King of Rock n Roll. Even today he is still remembered as ' The King'.

The decline of Rock n Roll was witnessed during the early 1960's with the death of famous musicians like Buddy Holy and Richie Valens in a plane crash; the departure of Elvis Presley for the army, the retirement of Little Richard to become a preacher, prosecutions of Jerry Lee Lewis and Chuck Berry and the breaking of the payola scandal. All of the above incidents gave a sensation that the rock and roll era has come to an end. However during its decline rock n roll witnessed a feminine side with an introduction of love ballads targeted to a female audience & the rise of girl groups like The Crystals and The Shirelles.

All the events that occurred in the 1950's eventually led to what came to be known as Surf Music, Garage Rock & the Twist dance craze. However the major event that was a hit in the 1960's was that of the rise of British Rock n Roll with the emergence of The Beatles which was greatly influenced by the America's 1950's Rock n Roll.

The 1960's

The 1960's witnessed many events like that of the Vietnam War, Civil Rights War, Surf Music, Hippie culture, The San Francisco Scene, The Music of Protests & the birth of Heavy Metal. Similarly Rock n Roll in the 1960's went through 4 phases or parts. These parts are as follows:

Part I – The Beatles & The British Invasion

Part II – Motown Music

Part III – Classic Rock: The Sounds of the 1960's

Part IV – Message Music

Before 1963 i. e. 1961 onwards America witnessed the rise of Surf Music a form of Rock n Roll. This music was pioneered by Duane Eddy, Link Wray, and The Ventures that added distinctive “ wet” reverb style & rapid alternate picking to the music. One of the famous hits was “ Let's Go Trippin” in 1961 and this launched the surf music craze.

The all time favourite band of this era is The Beach Boys.

Part I – The Beatles & The British Invasion

During this decade i. e. post 1963 America along with the rest of the world witnessed what came to be known only as ‘ The British Invasion’. During the 1960's the most well know and world renowned band of the British invasion was the one and only Beatles. The Beatles till today are considered to be the all time success stories of the 1960's. The main reason why the Beatles are considered one of the best and most influential rock bands of all time is the because they took what Elvis and other Rock n Roll artists created in the <https://assignbuster.com/the-rapid-evolution-of-rock-music/>

1950's and transformed it into a whole new different thing. Hence this era is known as one that gave birth to a new age of Rock.

The Beatlemania had begun with its first single hit song in 1962 “ Love Me Do” in Great Britain. Along with the Rock n Roll of the 1950's the Beatles popularized new genres of rock music ranging from ranging from folk rock to psychedelic pop. The Beatles were so influential during the 1960's that their progressive ideals were considered to be social & cultural revolutions. Other great hits of the Beatles include “ I Wanna Hold Your Hand” which sold 2. 6 million copies in the United States in just two weeks. The Beatles came out with many hits during this era such as “ She Loves You”, “ Please Please Me”, etc.

Other emerging bands in this era included The Dave Clark Five, The Kinks & The Rolling Stones. The Rolling Stones greatest hit during this period was “ Honky Tonk Woman”

Part II – Motown Music

Motown was a Detroit based record company that was founded by Berry Gordy who was a one-time assembly line worker at Ford Motors. It became the most successful black owned record company by 1963. Motown had a number of vocal groups, songwriters & musicians. The music recorded was known for its “ tight orchestrations and catchy lyrics”. The music was based on the injustice to the black community during the Civil War. The Motown greats were The Temptations, The Four Tops, Martha Reeves & the Vandellas and Diana Ross & The Supremes.

Part III – Classic Rock: The Sounds of the 1960's

This era witnessed what was known as the Hippie culture. Their main chant was ' Make Love Not War'. Peace was their underlying theme. The Beatles is one of the famous bands that transitioned during this phase in terms of their look and music. Other artist that came to existence were Jefferson Airplane, Grace Slick, Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, The Doors, Steppenwolf, Simon & Garfunkel, Mamas and the Pappas and Lovin Spoonful.

The famous concert of this era was The Woodstock. This was a concert for promoting peace, love & brotherhood. Artists like Jimi Hendrix rocked the concert.

Part IV – Message Music

Most themes found in rock and roll during this era dealt with love and relationships gone wrong. It followed the war on Vietnam & the various protests being undertaken. The music was an attempt to reflect upon the events occurring at that time like the civil rights movement, the growing unrest over the war in Vietnam, and the rise of feminism. The “ message” within the song focused on peace. Many songs received substantial airplay and became “ anthems” at concerts, rallies, and demonstrations.

The Message through Folk Music & The Message through Rock Music

The most well known artists to emerge from the folk tradition include Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, Phil Ochs, and the trio known as Peter, Paul, and Mary. In 1965, an artist, Barry McGuire hit the charts with a song that reflected the growing turmoil in the world.

Other popular hippy and psychedelic bands such as Pink Floyd, The Who, The Rolling Stones, The Yardbirds, the Grateful Dead, Jimi Hendrix, Cream, and others began to rule the world. These bands gave rise to the counterculture movement, trendsetters, with their drug induced lyrics and hypnotic melodies.

Other genres of rock began to emerge such as progressive rock which is experimenting with other instruments other than guitar, bass and drums. This was popularized by Pink Floyd. Folk rock was popularized by Bob Dylan and Janis Joplin. The 1960's ultimately gave birth to heavy metal which is a thick, heavy, and highly amplified genre of rock mainly popularized by Black Sabbath. The world was just now beginning to witness the tremendous power & impact rock really had on society.

The 1970's

In the 1970's the Vietnam War had ended, the protests stopped & people began to settle down. Along with that, the music too did settle down. The world witnessed the split of the Beatles & also the death of John Lennon. The 70's rock music brought different cultures and audiences closer together than ever before. Rock music began to branch out into new genres like Hard Rock, Heavy Metal & Punk Rock. Led Zeppelin became extremely popular with its perfect blend of Hard Rock & Blues music that they could call its own. In this era bands and artists such as David Bowie, Yes, The Eagles, and Queen became very influential.

Towards the late 70's the world also witnessed the rise of Punk Rock. The founding fathers of punk were The Ramones. They combined anarchism and

teenage rage with rock and roll and this came to be known as Punk Rock. Other bands such as The Sex Pistols and The Clash helped popularize and redefine punk rock. This new, powerful and intense genre of music influenced many bands of the future.

The 1980's

And then came the 1980's. Rock Music revolutionized itself in a way that everyone wanted to be part of the upcoming scene. The music took a different turn, more in terms of punk rock, new wave, heartland rock and alternative rock. Most people would think of the 80's as all about big hairdos and androgyny. The gay activists took to in a big way in this decade. People started embracing the opposite sex and everyone had colour in everything they did or wore. This inspired the rock music scene greatly. The eighties saw everything from enthusiasm to neon pink socks, worn by men. Creativity was expressed so greatly in the 1980's and artists wore their individuality with pride. The 1980's music scene is possibly considered as one of the strangest times in the evolution of rock music. Music artists were doing everything, a mix of bubblegum pop, sentimental forever ballads to thumping electric beats and even the hardest rock metal. This decade practically saw it all.

Artist such as Bruce Springsteen, Guns and Roses, Van Halen, AC/DC, Aerosmith, Iron Maiden, Metallica, Bon Jovi, and Motley Crue can best be remembered for their power ballads and great guitar solos.

A new genre of music called as 'New wave' also emerged from punk, funk, and disco. It was made popular by artists such as Divo, The B-52's, Talking Heads, and Blondie.

Indie rock or Alternative rock as it is well known began to emerge in the late 1980's with artists such as U2, R. E. M., The Cure, The Smiths, and Sonic Youth were very popular with college students. Punk also became more popular with bands such as Black Flag and the Dead Kennedys.

This was also the time of producers. They're importance grew and artists took notice that a good producer could take their records to the market. Then came the advent of having soundtracks in movies. Record companies realized the economics in placing a song in a movie, the response was tremendous.

Regardless of the variety, the music of the eighties was a big hit, it still is. And that's because the music spoke the minds of the people, it made no apologies, one could identify with a slow ballad by Phil Collins in the afternoon and put up their black leather jacket, rocking to Iron Maiden by night time, you don't have to apologize to anyone. Freedom of expression, experimenting and lyrics became an integral part of the eighties. And that is precisely the reason why the eighties they say will never die.

The 1990's

The early 90's was known as the era of grunge and alternative rock. Nirvana came to be known as the most popular grunge band of the 90's. Grunge music can be described as dirty guitar, strong guitar riffs with distortion and feedback. It consisted of dark lyrics and expressed teenage angst. Popular

grunge and alternative bands were Pearl Jam, Nirvana, Jane's Addiction and Alice in Chains.

A more iconic scene was that of the emergence of female artists. Women were becoming much less dependent on men, and less oriented towards having a family-based future. They were daughters of women who fought for equal rights and they expressed it- in the form of words and notes.

The magazine, Billboard brought about the commercial success of the music industry. It changed the way it ranked singles and albums of artists by tallying actual sales at retail stores instead of using the industry-manipulated word of mouth. Rock suddenly beat pop in terms of sales, and “ minority” genres such as country and hip-hop began to enter the charts. This led the industry to invest more in these minority genres.

The 1990's proved that music was for the listener and that the idea behind music was to view the artist as a whole, his production, his team, his lyrics, his image, his music video and his personality. Everyone had a favorite type of music and a favorite genre, a favorite artist and a favorite album. You couldn't help it- there were so many choices by this time.

2000 – Present

Alternative rock even today is one of the popular and broadest genre of rock music. Emo, is a new sub genre of rock that consists of intense emotional lyrics with hardcore punk roots. It was popularized by bands like From First to Last, The Used, Brand New and softer bands such as Dashboard Confessional and Bright Eyes which can also be described as indie.

The word “ indie” actually stands for independent and refers to bands that are part of an independent record label. However, today indie has a whole new meaning. Indie can be described as mainly underground and softer version of alternative rock. Popular indie bands include Death Cab for Cutie, The Strokes, Elliott Smith, The Decemberists, The Arcade Fire, The Postal Service & a few others.

Heavy metal has now reached an extremely new level. Sub-genres of heavy metal like black metal, death metal and thrash metal which is very loud, aggressive and fast entered the industry. Popular hardcore metal bands include Slipknot, As I Lay Dying, Korn, Norma Jean and Cannibal Corpse.

Alternative rock has now become an all time hit with bands such as Incubus, Red Hot Chili Peppers, Chevelle, Coldplay, and the Foo Fighters. Pop rock is another popular genre. It is rock mixed with a more mainstream approach and popular lyrics. Pop rock bands include Fall Out Boy, All-American Rejects, Ashlee Simpson, Avril Lavigne, and others.

Another form of music that came about was the rap rock. They symbolized the fusion of the raw, street music and hard rock pelting beats. It was an instant hit with the fans of both the genres. Examples of such were Linkin Park, Limp Bizkit, Faith no More, Rage Against the Machine, etc

Rock Music in the Indian Scenario

Rock music caught on in India during the mid 70's. I remember hearing stories of my father and his brothers in small time bands playing the good oldies like Elvis Presley, The Carpenters, The Beatles, The Shadows, Bob Dylan and other artists on their guitars. These were many such small groups

which were mainly Catholics that played all the dance numbers mainly for weddings & the Christmas dance. These were the jive & the twist numbers that people used to love to dance to back in the day. Towards the 80's artists like Led Zeppelin, Dire Straits & Jethro Tull became quiet popular. People used to purchase these music cassettes and listen to this kind of music on their audio cassette players & Sony Walkman.

That however was a very long time ago. Things soon changed with the Gulf War of 1991 opening the gates to media in India. MTV was one of the channels that were beamed, along with CNN. Apart from Pop music what caught on quickly was rock. However, as an audience, the numbers in India were still minimal. It was only bands like Def Leppard, Bon Jovi and U2 that caught the fancy of many people. To a large extent, rock began and ended with Deep Purple's Highway Star. The love for rock only meant name-dropping and wanting to sound fashionably rebellious.

All that changed quickly changed to from the year 2000 onwards. Hard rock quickly caught on along with its counterpart Heavy Metal and is literally worshipped in many engineering colleges all over India. Many groups have been formed in various areas where the rock scene is still alive. These include Goa, Bangalore, Mumbai, Pune & Delhi. Many popular India bands hail from these areas and have composed pretty famous hits that are well known to the Indian Rockers. Many engineering colleges still pay tribute to Rock by hosting Rock shows where fans from various parts of the country rush to gather head bang in harmony.

The first rock band in India to become famous was Indus Creed. Famous Indian rock bands of today include bands like Zero, Pentagram, Parikrama, Them Clones and various others. One happening rock shows of Mumbai used to be the Independence Rock gig at Rang Bhavan popularly known as I-Rock which used to be packed and crowded as it was very popular and had bands playing from all over the country. Off late the popularity of i-rock has died down due to the change in date and venue due to certain restrictions.

Another new genre of rock music that has probably evolved in India is Fusion rock which involves blending Indian classical instruments with that of the electric guitar, keyboard & drums. This is something that is definitely coming up in the country with rock songs in Hindi rather than English and even in Hinglish. I still feel that there is very poor liberalization for Rock music in our country but as time passes by things will definitely seem to be getting better. One evident fact is Channel V's 'Launch Pad' that takes place every year that hunts to find the Countries most popular and best Rock band. Along with Channel V, MTV has also started something called as Rock on Desi Beats that hunts for fusion rock bands of the country and popularizes the best. Another evident fact that rock music is catching up quickly was the launch of the movie 'Rock On' directed by & starring Farhan Akhtar.

Conclusion

Hence I strongly believe that Rock music with its legendary History can never die out. It will always be a part of culture and will always be know as that which shapes culture & strongly affects society. It is finally meant for people to understand that Rock is just about the music and the passion it drives in the youth. It should not be stereotyped with drug abuse alcoholism & other

vices. For this to happen it is the people that must change their ways and also it is essential for the famous artists to set a better example as they owe it to their fans as much as they owe it to the music. Another important factor is that although opportunities in the country for Rock music are very low & it is extremely tough to become big, society must encourage the youngsters that have a passion for this music.

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