

Diabolus In Musica

David Priest

The Devil's Music?

Ever since its inception, Rock and Roll has come under considerable fire from conservative, political and religious factions alike. Over the decades it has been seen by the vast majority of these parties as a primary cause for rebellion among the youth of our nations and the ultimate decline of morality within our modern culture. While the days of record burning parties, as was once the popular anti-rock statement for clergymen of the 1970's, are a thing of the past and the PMRC or "Parents Music Resource Center" of the 1980's is a distant memory, every generation has sparked a new movement in which to voice a stand against the evils of Rock. In recent years the influence of such Heavy Metal artists as **Marilyn Manson, Slayer, Slipknot** and others have allegedly lead to a number of school yard shootings and teen suicides, in addition, during the early to mid-90's there were over fifty churches in Norway that were burned to the ground by Black Metal (overtly Satanic) musicians. These instances are definitely above and beyond the normal everyday influx of drugs and promiscuity that tend to accompany the Rock and Roll lifestyle and are occasions that have marked a considerable rise in concern for the well being of the populace in the face of such hateful and destructive characterization.

Not denying that these occurrences are extremely disconcerting to say the least, to hold the belief that all Rock music is negative and incapable of being a positive force in the world is not an easy task to accomplish when there stands in

contrast to these views an opposing side that insists that Rock has in fact opened a number of doors that have helped to shape the world in a positive light and broken down barriers that once prohibited people around the world freedoms that had previously been denied them. Such examples can be found by looking at artists such as **The Beatles** who despite their drug tainted history sent a universal message of peace and unity for all humankind, or more recent artists like **U2** who spoke of racial equality and freedom of religious oppression. In addition there were the mega-collaborations of musicians in the form of **USA For Africa**, the European equivalent **Band-Aid**, and the often overlooked group of Heavy Metal musicians led by **Ronnie James Dio**, *Hear N' Aid*, who all helped to raise massive amounts of money to feed starving people in Africa and alleviate a terrible famine.

There are no doubts that both those for and against Rock music have relevant arguments to plead their case but where each side may present their reasons admirably and, in certain cases in point, prove to be the more logical way of perceiving a given situation, the truth of the matter is that they can't both be 100% correct. In the following pages we will look at some of the arguments leveled against Rock music and the rebuttals given in an attempt to answer the question of whether or not it truly is, as the anti-rock Christian divisions have dubbed it "the Devil's music," or if it can be a vehicle in which either good or evil can be the end result.

Music to My Ears

There have been many criticisms set forth against Rock music throughout its history and while there are most assuredly those, although of the minority, who would begin their argument on the basis of Rock not being construed as music at all; that particular argument is fleeting. Granted, there are certain groups who see a clear division between secular Rock music and Christian Rock music but the majority of contenders really see no difference at all. To say that true music or true Christian music must contain a “perfect balance of melody, harmony and rhythm” as is indicated by one of Rock’s early attackers, Lenny Seidel in his book *Face the Music - Contemporary Church Music On Trial*, is really a matter of opinion. According to Encyclopedia Britannica,

Rock, originally Rock and Roll, was a musical style that arose in the U.S. in the 1950’s. Through assimilation and evolution of other styles, and the broadening of the name itself, Rock came to be the dominant form of popular music. Aimed at an audience of teenagers, it was a fundamentally simple style, relying on heavy dance oriented rhythms, common melodies and harmonies and lyrics sympathetic to its audiences concerns.

Obviously different cultures have many diverse types of music and their definitions for what can be defined as music will ultimately differ greatly. Musical culture has been evolving for many thousands of years and Rock is no exception. Being that there are only seven notes in music all arranged in different patterns

and orchestrations, it is a really big stretch to say that because of how it is arranged, it is less than classical music, country, blues, jazz, etc. when the same notes are used in all. Ironically, the belief that certain arrangements should be deemed 'evil' is nothing new. During the middle ages the church banned the use of the **tritone** or "Devil in Music" as it came to be known. Thankfully we are no longer in the dark ages and people for the most part have dismissed this idea, just as they did the idea that the earth is flat; only a very scattered few actually still believe that.

Following a similar line of thought, the religious community has spent quite a number of years passing on their own urban legend of sorts about 'the devil beat'. As the story goes, a missionary's daughter in Java who played contemporary Christian music was approached by one of the natives and told that the music being played had the same beat that the natives had previously used in pagan celebrations. Curious as to which Rock album might be the offending culprit; author Al Menconi in his book *Today's Music: A Window to Your Child's Soul* speaks of his research into the matter and of his findings. "I didn't believe the story when I first heard it. The conclusions seemed ludicrous. The windshield wipers on my '82 VW have a similar beat; will I get poor gas mileage because of it?" Upon finding the story to be true, the results of his findings brought the conclusion that the album, titled *Songs of a New Generation*, which was produced by Youth For Christ/Campus Life in the early 70's featured performers like **Cliff Barrows**, **The Spurlows** and **Ralph Carmichael** among others. Menconi continues, "the songs included 'It's Free' (with a smooth calypso

beat), 'When the Roll is Called Up Yonder', and one of the most beautiful renditions of 'He's Everything To Me', which has been popular in Bible believing churches for decades. So either the native was wrong in his interpretation or millions of Christians are being ministered to by demon possessed music."

Did You Get The Message?

In contrast to the criticisms that we have covered so far, I believe the real test of integrity comes not by the sound of the music but rather the message that is being sent and its influence on the listener. The ideals and philosophies that are delivered can come via a myriad of ways, including the lyrical content. Perhaps more than words though, the lifestyles that we demonstrate are much more impacting than what is being said. There is no doubt that words play an important role for those who actually take the time to read them, but for a good portion of Rock fans the words are merely a formality. If a particular song invites the listener to indulge in negative attitudes and actions, the extent of that damage is heightened when the artist reinforces their position by acting upon it themselves; as is indicated by the band members in Norway who decided burning churches was a good idea. What was initiated by those particular musicians in question ultimately led to a number of fans continuing on in the same manner of destruction. How an artist presents themselves in accordance with their actions,

the way they dress, what issues they stand by and what they have to say about life and the world surrounding us is why anti-Rock critics such as Jeff Godwin are apprehensive to the genre as a whole.

Knowing that music can be such a powerful tool and the messenger even more influential than the music itself, the question arises: What purpose does Rock serve and what agenda do these musicians actually ascribe to? Is it an avenue in which political and social change can be made? Perhaps it can even be used to lead someone to spiritual enlightenment or a relationship with Christ? Then again maybe that is all just a rouse to draw the listener in to the real reasons behind the artist's plan? Godwin insists that, "the business of Rock, is a multi-billion dollar industry where bands sell a hundred thousand CD's at a crack". Granted, there is a lot of money being made, although being a musician myself and a journalist who works with many of today's top Rock artists, I see them playing the same small venues that they started off in and struggling to stay on the road in order to bring their music to the masses. In reality most of them do not live in mansions and drive expensive sports cars. The phrase "it's all about the music" has been used freely for many generations and I find more often than not that this is a very true statement.

As a lyricist myself, the only agenda I have in relation to the fan's acceptance of my music is to allow the listener to identify with me on some level and use my experiences to gain strength and understanding for their own life. I believe in being positive and looking for the good in things rather than the bad, but also I

believe in being truthful and the truth is that sometimes we hurt. In addition to the largely popular groups mentioned at the beginning of this article, there are a few other artists who I have a great deal of respect for and feel the need to mention them here. While they may not be tearing up the charts, I do believe that they are making a positive, worthwhile contribution to the music world. Indiana-based **Iced Earth** released a wonderful album that is extremely educational titled *The Glorious Burden* in which they show interesting perspective on the events of the battle at Gettysburg during the civil war. Likewise, the band known as **Symphony X** from New Jersey brought forth an album titled; *The Odyssey* after Homer's poem, Colorado's **Jag Panzer** detailed the story of Shakespeare's Macbeth on their 2000 album *Thane to the Throne* and Germany's **Blind Guardian** base the bulk of their material on the works of J.R.R. Tolkien. Surprisingly these are not the Satanic, drug-frenzied bands that most religious Rock critics make them out to be. I am not saying that there are not bands in existence with an agenda of fame, fortune and, in some cases, debauchery or the abolishment of government, organized religion and the promotion of the devil; there most definitely are, but just because some take this path does not mean that all do.

Mimic the Devil

For a moment I would like to look at the Christian Rock industry specifically and one attack in particular aimed directly at those involved. Biblically speaking, we are called to “be **in** the world but not **of** the world” and according to the scripture passage found in John 15:18-19, we are very clearly instructed to be different from those in the world who are non-believers. The passage reads, “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.” What exactly does it mean to “be in but not of”? Where do we draw the line? If copying the world means that we shouldn’t play the same kind of music or dress a certain way, we must take that idea to its conclusion and say that if middle eastern terrorists wear pants, then we should not for fear of being likened too much to the world. When you take this particular passage in context with John 7:24 – “Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.”(NASB), it is very difficult to believe that we are to take the teaching to such extremes. We should instead be looking at the moral and philosophical points of view that are being communicated. In essence Christian Rock is no more copying the world than a pastor wearing a three piece suit is copying the Columbian drug lord who happens to own the same suit. In addition let us remember what Christ himself said in Mark 9:40 – “For he who is not against us is for us (NASB). I believe that

Francis Schaeffer in his series *How Should We Then Live* stresses very prominently the need, desire and biblical basis for Christians to be involved in the arts. Today more than ever we should be utilizing the gifts that God has bestowed on us and strive to make a difference in the world.

The Intent of the Driver

Having examined various criticisms espoused by anti-Rock crusaders, the final underlying question remains, can this vehicle of Rock music be used to advocate both good and/or evil? In determining this I think we need to look at the intent of the individual. Yes, there are those who will use this tool as a means for doing evil but that does not make all Rock music bad as we discussed briefly earlier in this article. To offer up an example, think for a moment about an intoxicated person who decides to get behind the wheel of his or her car and in doing so hits and kills a pedestrian. Does this make all cars bad? No, it must be attributed to the intent of the driver, in the same way; music can be a vehicle for both good and evil.

As to whether or not music, specifically Rock music can be used by God, we should look at the argument that encompasses the nature of God. Can God lie? Can he make a rock so big that he cannot move it? This has been a strong philosophical thought for hundreds of years, but if God is truly omnipotent, this

feat should actually be possible; however, if it were possible then he would in turn not be all powerful. If he were unable to accomplish the task of moving the rock, his omnipotence is challenged and he is either a liar or he truly is omnipotent. Since both cannot be true and we are expected to believe that he is not a liar and is all powerful, there must be another way of perceiving this scenario. As a result the argument thus far becomes self defeating. The answer though, lies in God's nature and since it is not in his nature to do such a thing as this, the argument becomes pointless. In the same way we can apply this line of thought to the problem of Rock being a means to advance religious thought or ideas. Since it is within God's nature to use anything within his creation, we can assume that he can in fact use Rock music in any way he deems.

Personal Thoughts

Throughout my life I feel that I have had to lead two very different lifestyles, one being loyal to my Christian faith and the other to my musical endeavors. Over the years I've learned to combine both. It has taken some time to come to the realization that there need not be any separation. God gave me abilities that should be used to the fullest extent that I am capable of. I have come under many attacks from both sides, both saying that if I listen to, play or am involved in rock music or in my case, more specifically the genre of Heavy Metal that I

cannot be a 'true' follower of Christ as this music is most assuredly the Devil's own.

I find that depending on whom you speak with, both sides for the most part, strive to promote unity, compassion, hope and ultimately love in some regard but fail to compromise their position in any way. Why do people spend so much time and effort preaching these positive values but when acting only seem to evoke hatred and misunderstanding for the other person's points of view in question.

Ironically, the method in which I came to an understanding of the Gospel and a realization that I actually needed a Savior came via my attendance at a Christian Rock concert. So while this particular topic of interest may not quite take hold of everyone, it is in fact a very personal point of contention in my own life. For if Rock Music is of the Devil, as has been touted, it would call into question my own salvation. As a firm believer in both the power of God and the power of Rock I would like to state, for the record, that I have never worshipped the Devil, I am not a drug user, nor have I ever been, I have never been sexually promiscuous, and for all intents and purposes I am more-or-less a common, middle-class American i.e. I work, take care of my family, try to be the best husband, father and friend that I can be and am accountable to a body of believers.

No doubt this particular issue has overcome obstacles since it first became a problem and has seen many individuals who once stood sternly against rock, the battle has still not been completely won, for every time an artist chooses to use

this gift of music in a negative manner, it levels another strike against those who believe it can be used for good. I feel that the more these issues are discussed and reiterated the more we will grow and mature and come to a better understanding of how to deal with the pros and cons of this genre accordingly. To coin a widely-used phrase among defenders of the 'faith', "Rock and Roll is here to stay." We would do well as a society to realize that this is not something that is going to go away. If we take hold of it and use it to our advantage, rather than attempt to drive it to annihilation, which seems completely futile at this point, our culture will ultimately benefit, as opposed to suffer and perhaps in time there will be no more division between these rival factions.

Works Cited

Encyclopedia Britannica, Micropedia Ready Reference and index VIII. 622.....

Geisler, Norman/Howell,Thomas, (When Critics Ask Baker Books,1992) 135-136

Godwin, Jeff, What's Wrong With Christian Rock? (Chick Publications, 1990), 194-196.....

Holy Bible, New International Version (Broadman & Holman Publishers).....

Holy Bible, New American Standard Bible (Zondervan Publishing House).....

Holy Bible, New American Standard Bible (Zondervan Publishing House).....

Menconi, Al, *Songs of a New Generation: A Window To Your Child's Soul*, (David C. Cook Publishing Company, 1990), 140

Schaeffer, Francis, How Should We Then Live (Crossway Books, 1976) 65-71

Seidel, Leonard J., *Face the Music: Contemporary Church Music On Trial* (Grace Unlimited Publications, 1988), 46-51

Additional books recommended if you fancy a deeper look:

Sound of the Beast: The Complete Headbanging History of Heavy Metal - Ian Christie

Why Should the Devil Have all the Good Music - Larry Norman

The Rock & Roll Rebellion – Mark Joseph

Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground –Michael Moynihan, Didrik Soderlind