Essence Of Rock and Roll: How Sounds and Lyrics Harmonize

Introduction

'Rock music is important to people because it allows them to escape this crazy world. It allows them not to run away from the problems that are there, but to face up to them, but at the same time, sort of dance all over them. That is what rock and roll is all about' (Pete Townshend, 1968). Rock music is a very loud, exciting, and complex genre of music that is and was loved for many generations. It creates a feeling of power as well as relaxation and joy among those who listen to it, which is why many people enjoy it and why it is such a popular musical genre still to this day. Many children and teens who listen to Rock music were introduced to it by their parents who grew up with the '70s, '80s and '90s Rock and Roll, which is what I will be writing about in this report. I will mention the history of Rock and Roll, influencers from the 1970-1990's era, and most importantly, how the lyrics and instruments in Rock songs influence the listener's thoughts and emotions while hearing the music.

What is Rock music?

Rock music could be defined as "a broad genre of popular music that originated as 'rock and roll' in the United States in the early 1950s" (Wikipedia 2019), and "was inspired by country and African-American rhythm and blues from the 1920s and 30s. Even from its inception, rock music has been constantly evolving, and continuously creating subgenres" (Gillett, 2018) such as Surf music and Jazz in the 1960s, Heavy Metal and Soft/Hard Rock in the 1970s, and Emo/Punk Rock later on. Rock music can be found on CD's, vinyl's, and on Classic Rock radio stations, such as the Toronto station 107.1. This genre of music usually features instruments such as electric guitar, drums, piano, synth sounds, and one or more singers (Wikipedia 2018). The electric guitar and drums are the most important and focussed sound in many generic Rock songs, but many Rock singers focus their lyrics about love and heartbreak which creates this interesting distinction in the track. The harsh, loud sound of the electric guitar and drums together along with the soft, gentle lyrics about love contrast each other and can create a certain mood for the listener. Whether it be anger, sympathy, or even sadness, the listener can relate to the singer and to the instruments on an emotional, psychological or even physical level because of this contrast. For those who listen to music to feel the instruments and for those who listen to music to feel the lyrics, Rock music will be enjoyable for them.

Tenderness and Betrayal: How Sounds and Lyrics Harmonize

Many love songs have a soft, melodic sound to them as they slowly guide the listener through the track, with gentle, calm lyrics to match. However, Rock music brings the idea of love songs into a whole new light, as the rash sound of the banging drums and the electrifying sound of the guitar come together and clash with the sensitive tone of the words. This causes the listener to feel a certain deep emotional connection to the singer because the pain and passion in the singer's voice are extenuated by the loud instruments in the song.

An example of this would be the song Iris by The Goo Goo Dolls. This song has the sounds of a soft piano, violin, bass drum and acoustic guitar during the verses, but when the chorus arrives, and as the main singer sings more aggressively, the electric guitar creates an aggressive, passionate harmony to match the singer's raunchier notes. However, this entire song is about love and sensitivity. The main singer says:

"And you can't fight the tears that ain't coming

Or the moment of truth in your lies

When everything feels like the movies

Yeah you bleed just to know you're alive

And I don't want the world to see me

'Cause I don't think that they'd understand

When everything's meant to be broken

I just want you to know who I am" (Rzeznik, 1998).

In these lyrics, the singer is expressing his feelings about how even though he is helpless and upset about the hardships he is facing in his life, all he cares about in the end is his lover knowing and caring about how he feels and who he really is deep inside. The lyrics show this certain vulnerable sadness of the singer as he belts these heartfelt words during the chorus. The song without the lyrics would seem relaxing, or even desolate to the listener because of the acoustic guitar and the piano but may change to anger and frustration during the electric guitar solo and drums. The lyrics, however, create a constant feeling of vulnerability and sympathy for the listener along with the underlying emotional tones from the instruments, as they complement each other in a comforting yet responsive way.

A more Rock-Metal example of this idea would be the song Love Bites by Def Leppard. There is a very distinct electric guitar opening the song, along with drums and the synth/keyboard sounds. These instruments carry on throughout the song but become more aggressive and loud during the chorus and afterwards. One would not believe that this song is about love if they did not listen to the lyrics because the song itself is just so hard and masculine-sounding. It is hard to believe that such an aggressive song would be associated with the 'feminine' emotion known as love. The song states:

"When I'm with you are you somewhere else?

Am I getting through or do you please yourself?

When you wake up will you walk out?

It can't be love if you throw it about

Ooh, babe, I don't want to touch you too much baby

'Cause making love to you might drive me crazy" (Clark, 1987).

The artist is articulating his jealousy and desire to be the only one his lover is focussed on through his lyrics and singing style in the song. He is almost growling, and his voice is very raunchy and passionate as he belts these lines to show his frustration and want for his lover. This record would be described as a more masculine approach to a love song, as it is more about a man's primal desire for a woman and less about sensitivity and vulnerability. One may listen to this song and feel more in touch with their sexual feelings because of how powerful the instruments sound with the somewhat erotic lyrics. The loud, aggressive instruments create a pulsing beat through the body of the listener and it generates a feeling of power and dominance in them. The words complement the tone of the song very well to produce a complex yet enjoyable atmosphere for the audience.

Rock and Roll: The Effect on 2019

The most popular genre of music in 2019 is Pop, and most Pop songs nowadays are derived from Rock and Roll. Whether it be the hard, distinct bass or the heartfelt lyrics, it is evident that Pop is a sub-genre from Rock and Roll. "Some believe the pop music genre to be shallow, with simple songs about nothing more than partying, drinking, and sex. But the genre has always been so much more—it's the melting pot of music, a place where sounds of all sorts have been blended together, connected by the melody and structure of traditional pop. And its eclectic sound has not shied away from tackling topics, like love and loss and life—the emotions that sit at the heart of every kind of music" (Myers, 2016). Pop music is a blend of many branches of Rock, such as Soft Rock, Surf, and Emo. Along with the theme of feeling the harmony of lyrics with sounds, Pop music focusses more on a computerized synth melody rather than real instruments like the electric guitar in Rock music.

Why I Chose Rock Music

I chose Rock music because it is a genre I grew up with in my household, as my parents very much enjoy it. I have not truly taken the time to fully listen and appreciate this genre as they have, so I took this assignment as an opportunity to allow myself to see what they love so much about Rock. I listen to more alternative music, such as Tame Impala, and I noticed that many of the sounds and musical techniques used in the music I enjoy came from older Rock music, like the kind my parents listen to. My father plays some of his Rush music in the car, however, I have never taken the time to genuinely listen, feel, and contemplate the sounds I was hearing. I am more open to different kinds of music more than I was when I was younger, so I appreciate the sounds of all the instruments coming together to create a specific kind of harmony that I am growing to enjoy. I also am aware that a lot of popular music genres nowadays are rooted from the '50s and '60s Rock and Roll, so I figured it would be quite interesting to research and learn about the different genres that branched off from Rock. I would not have guessed that such a relaxing, mellow genre such as Surf came from such a loud, exciting genre like Rock and Roll.

As I mentioned, I enjoy more relaxing, blues-type music, and also alternative music. Some artists I enjoy are Frank Ocean, Tame Impala, and Daniel Caesar. These artists all sing about love which relates to Rock music. I enjoy different sounds, music that does not make much sense, confusing yet deep lyrics, and strange beats in music. However, I am also drawn to Rock and Roll-type beats in alternative music, such as in the song Eventually by Tame Impala, or a

softer, Surf-Rock version like Japanese Denim by Daniel Caesar. The song Eventually is very aggressive and loud like most Hard Rock songs, and Tame Impala has that specific Rock singer type of voice that is very distinct in most Classic Rock songs. This song is also something that heavily influenced me to research Rock and Roll music. I figured since I enjoy this song so much, why not dig deeper into why I do? I also noticed the lyrics of Classic Rock songs are more straightforward as if thoughts were put onto a page verbatim. The lyrics of the music I enjoy could be described as ‘deep', or metaphorical, which differs from Rock. Some other differences are the volume of the singer themselves as they sing, I enjoy more relaxing songs whereas Rock singers have a high vocal range and can sing very loud if they please. I never realized how skilled most Rock singers are to be able to hit those high, belted, raunchy notes. I would personally say that the most interesting thing I learned about Rock music is how almost every genre I ever knew came from Rock and Roll in some way because it influences the musicians I listen to so heavily yet I'm so oblivious to it. I do not even listen to Rock, yet everything I do listen to comes from it. That is so strange and interesting to me, and I will definitely be listening to more Rock and Roll because of this. I enjoyed listening to Rock as I researched the topic because of the different ways it made me feel throughout the songs, and from the instruments and the lyrics combining into one intense, enjoyable harmony.

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