

A Closer Look At Rock Music

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Dear Members of the Endtime Issues Newsletter:

The many messages I have received during the past few weeks from the members of our Endtime Issues Newsletter, have made me forcefully aware of the fact that rock music is a very touchy subjects. Though over 90% of the messages received express genuine appreciation for the symposium we are preparing on THE CHRISTIAN AND ROCK MUSIC, I did receive several messages very critical of our efforts. Some of them could be categorized as "hate mail."

On my part I am grateful for both the positive and negative comments, because both of them help me to see more distinctly what the real issues are. Some concerned fellow-believers have advised me to stay out of this controversial subject, especially since an increasing number of churches are introducing drums, guitars, synthesizers, and rocky type of music in their worship service. They feel that this research will foster controversy and division.

The fact that a subject is controversial, has never been a deterrent for me. My concern has always been to examine current issues from a Biblical perspective, irrespective of the outcome. My beloved father who recently passed away always challenged me to stand for what I know to be a Biblical moral principle. In my view the issue is not whether this research will prove to be controversial, but rather whether we are facing a problem that needs to be addressed in the light of Scriptural principles.

The reports many of you have emailed me, indicate that the adoption of contemporary pop music for church services is becoming a divisive issue in many parts of the world. This is not surprising, After all rock music is the most popular cultural phenomenon of our time and Adventist people are not immune from its influence.

To resist the influence of rock music, it is imperative that we understand its true nature and its devastating impact on the physical, mental, and spiritual aspects of our lives. This is the aim of this research project that a group of us scholars have undertaken. Our assumption is that those who are promoting in our churches contemporary pop music with a rock beat, are most likely acting in good faith, without understanding the true nature of rock.

The factual information we have gathered about the nature of rock music during the course of this investigation, makes it abundantly clear that such music cannot be legitimately transformed into Christian music by changing its lyrics. In whatever version, rock music is and remains a music that embodies a spirit of rebellion against God and the moral principles he has revealed for our lives.

The chapter you are about to read, should prove to be most informative. For me it has been an enlightening experience to discover that rock music differs from all other forms of music on account of its driving, loud, relentless beat. Scientific studies have shown that the rock beat can alter the mind and cause several physical reactions, including sexual arousal. It is evident that the use of such music in the worship service is inappropriate, because the function of church music is not to stimulate people physically, but to elevate them spiritually.

Three of the contributors to this symposium have already sent me their essays. The remaining four essays should be on hand within the next few weeks. Words fail to express my gratitude to God for the providential way His Spirit has impressed

professional, competent musicians in different parts of the world to contribute chapters to this timely study. Pray that the Lord may give us wisdom in the final preparation of this manuscript.

My next chapter will focus on MUSIC AND WORSHIP IN THE BIBLE. Several subscribers have complained that I have not taken into consideration those Biblical passages which in their view support the use of modified forms of rock music for worship. Rest assured that all the relevant passages are examined in the next chapter which will be posted within three or four weeks.

WEBSITE UPDATE

You will be pleased to know that all the previous 35 ENDTIME ISSUES NEWSLETTERS have been posted in my website. If for any reason you have lost any of the previous newsletters, please download them from my website at <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com>. The newsletters are available both in HTML format and Adobe PDF version. The latter is useful for those who want to print out the newsletters to share with their friends. You can also access sample chapters from all the 15 volumes I have authored. We have posted about 2000 pages of Biblical research in the website. Feel free to use my website at any time for your personal Bible study.

CHAPTER 5
A CLOSER LOOK AT ROCK MUSIC
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Rock music is the most popular cultural phenomenon of the second half of the twentieth century, influencing our entire culture. It is the greatest propagator of the moral, social, and aesthetic revolution we are experiencing today. The sound and philosophy of rock music penetrates virtually every area of daily activity. Its insistent, pulsating beat can be heard in homes, offices, places of businesses, and even in churches. Rock music has invaded every aspect of life.

Rock music has become an effective way to communicate a new set of values and to produce a new religious experience to an emerging generation. Before rock music, the family as a whole enjoyed music as a wholesome form of entertainment. The old European music influenced the music of the first half of the twentieth century and was regarded as “good for the kids.”

A radical change began in the 1950s with the introduction of rock music, which has created a rift between the older and younger generation. Nothing excites the passions of young people today as rock music. As Allan Bloom of the University of Chicago points out, “Today, a very large proportion of young people between the ages of ten and twenty live for rock music. . . . When they are in school and with their family, they long to plug themselves back into their music. Nothing surrounding them—school, family, church—has anything to do with their music world.”¹

What is it that makes rock music so attractive, an irresistible addiction for many people, in spite of its revolutionary anti-Christian and countercultural nature? Why is it that even Christian churches are adopting more and more sanitized forms of rock music for their worship service and evangelistic outreach? Is there something unique in the structure of rock music and/or in its lyrics, that makes this music substantially different and more addictive than any other form of music? Quentin Schultze notes that “Musicologists have pondered the enigmas of rock’s attraction and have generally gone away mystified, for rock hardly fits into the high-culture formalist definition of musical accomplishment.”²

Objectives of this Chapter. It would be presumptuous to claim that this chapter resolves the enigmas of rock’s attraction by identifying all the contributing factors to the unprecedented popularity of such music. Any attempt to be comprehensive in the analysis of such a complex social phenomenon like rock music, risks the danger of being a superficial study.

This chapter seeks to understand what accounts for the long-lasting and overwhelming popularity of rock music by continuing the investigation conducted in the last three chapters into the nature of rock music. The underlying assumption of this study is that the reasons Christians and secular people are attracted to rock music are to be found in what such music offers in terms of excitement, worldview, value system, and religious experience.

So far our investigation has focused on the worldview of rock music, its ideological development, and religious experience. In chapter 2 we found that rock music has a pantheistic conception of God as an immanent impersonal supernatural power which the individual can experience through the hypnotic rhythm of rock music and drugs. The pantheistic conception of God has facilitated the acceptance of rock music among Christians and secularly minded people, since both groups seek to fulfill the inner urge for a pleasurable experience of the supernatural through the hypnotic effects of rock music.

In chapter 3 we traced the ideological evolution of rock music by focusing on the values that have emerged during the course of its history. We found that rock music has gone through an easily-discernible hardening process from rock ‘n’ roll to hard rock, acid rock, heavy metal rock, rap rock, thrash rock, etc. New types of more perverted forms of

rock music are constantly appearing, because rock addicts constantly demand something stronger and stronger to meet their craving.

In chapter 4 we found that the pantheistic worldview promoted by rock music has eventually led to the rejection of the Christian faith and to the acceptance of a new kind of religious experience. The latter involves the use of rock music, sex, drugs, and dance to transcend the limitation of time and space and connect with the supernatural.

This chapter continues and completes the investigation into the nature of rock music, by taking a closer look at its defining characteristic, namely, its rhythm. We will survey scientific studies which indicate that the rock beat affects rock the body in a way that is unlike any other type of music, by altering the mind and cause several physical reactions, including sexual arousal.

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part examines the structure of rock music itself, especially its characteristic rhythm and beat. The second part discusses how the church should respond to rock music by choosing instead good music that respects the proper balance among melody, harmony, and rhythm. Such balance reflects and fosters order and balance in our Christian life among the spiritual, mental, and physical components of our beings.

PART 1 THE STRUCTURE OF ROCK MUSIC

The defining characteristic of good music is the balance between three basic elements: melody, harmony, and rhythm. Other elements such as form, dynamics, text, and performance practices could be listed, but for the purpose of our study we limit our discussion to the three above-mentioned elements. Rock music inverts this order, by making rhythm its dominant element, then harmony, and last melody.

Before looking at the role that rhythm plays in rock music and its effect on the human body, it might be helpful for those less versed in music, to explain how melody, harmony, and rhythm are integrated together in good music.

The Melody. The melody is the most prominent part of the music. It is the “story line” of a piece of music and consists in the horizontal arrangement of notes which is recognized first when we sing a song like “All to Jesus I Surrender.” Those who sing what is called the harmony, such as the alto, tenor or bass parts, are singing a melody that “harmonizes” with the other three parts.

Aaron Copland, who is regarded as the dean of American composers, makes this observation about a good melody: “Why a good melody should have the power to move us has thus far defied all analysis . . . Though we may not be able to define what a good melody is in advance, we certainly can make some generalizations about melodies that we already know to be good.”³

According to Copland a good melody has the following general characteristics:

- “It must have rise and fall (i.e., pitches going up and down. A melody that remains static (on the same pitch) can through repetition produce a hypnotic effect. . . .
- “It must have satisfying proportions (i. e., a beginning, middle, and ending) and give a sense of completeness. The melody tells the story of the piece.
- “It must at some points (usually near the end) come to a climax and then a resolution. All good art will have a climax.
- “It will be written in such a way to elicit an emotional response by the listener.”⁴ Rock music, as we shall see, lacks several of these characteristics .

The Harmony. The harmony is produced by the chords which match the key structure in which the melody is written. It is the sound that we hear when the various parts coincide. “As a melody provides the ‘profile’ for a piece of music, the harmony its ‘personality.’”⁵

“Chords can provide both rest (consonance) and unrest (dissonance) in music. Good music will have a balance of rest and unrest. Harmonic chords can also color our mood as listeners. For example, What if every song were written with the harmonization in a minor key? That would definitely affect our mood. This aspect of music may be difficult for a nonmusician to comprehend. You know it when you hear it, but you may not be sure how to define it.”⁶

The Rhythm. The rhythm is what makes the music move. Without rhythm music becomes one continuous, boring, and uninteresting sound. “Rhythm is the orderly movement of music through time. Just as the heartbeat is the life of the body, rhythm is the life of the music and provides its essential energy. Without rhythm, music is dead. Melody and harmony must unfold together, and rhythm makes this simultaneous unfolding possible.”⁷

Everything in nature, including the human body, has rhythm. There is a rhythm to the heartbeat, respiration, and speech. Some scientist have discovered that even the

brain functions in rhythm.⁸ Brain waves are constant in frequency and are influenced by physical and mental states.

The same is true in music, where rhythm is organized into regular recurring beats, which make up what is known as “meter.” Usually the group of beats come in patterns of two, three, or four. “Repetition of these patterns in music is divided by measures. In any good piece of music, the strongest beat in a pattern (measure) is the downbeat (the first beat in the pattern). If a pattern has four beats, the strongest beat will be the first, and the second strongest beat will be the third, as pictured in the measure that follows:

/ONE, two, THREE, four/⁹

Rhythm in Rock Music. Rock music reverses the common order of the beat by placing the emphasis on what is known as the backbeat or the breakbeat. In the backbeat the main emphasis falls on beat four and the secondary beat on beat two as pictured in the measure that follows:

/one, TWO, three, FOUR/

The breakbeat, also known as *constant syncopation*, displaces the regular accent of the first portion of the beat to the second portion of the beat. This creates a kind of metrical jerk as illustrated by the measure below:

/one-AND, two-AND, three-AND, four-AND/

Syncopation in itself is not bad. When used correctly it can enhance a piece of music. Good composers know how much syncopation to use but *they never use it continuously throughout a piece of music*. It is like salt and pepper. When used in the right proportion they give taste to the food. But when used in excessive amounts, they spoil the food.

The fundamental problem with rock music is its relentless beat which dominates the music and produces an hypnotic effect. Bob Larson, whose career as a popular rock musician gave him a firsthand experience of the rock scene, points out that “the major issue for consideration from a moral and spiritual standpoint is the extent to which a pulsated or syncopated beat overrides the other musical elements in a song so that the level of communication is primarily sexual and physically arousing.”¹⁰

In good music, as Tim Fisher explains, “the correct order is a good melody, supported by balanced harmony, undergirded with a firm and consistent rhythm. Concert music (i. e., a symphony or another instrumental piece of music) will sometimes vary from this order because of a desire to showcase the talents of the composer or the dexterity of the performer. However, our topic here is Christian music as it relates to communicating the spoken word. If you desire to communicate a text with music, the order is clear: melody, harmony, then rhythm.”¹¹

Rock music reverses the order of good music by making the rhythm the most important part of the sound. Larson explains: “Unlike other forms of music which may reveal melodic inventiveness, the focus of rock is usually on the beat. It is a drummer’s holiday. . . . Jazz has a rhythmic swing. It flows with an exciting yet ultimately releasing feeling. But rock is built from a hard, straight-up-and-down pounding rhythm that produces frustrated energy. Some rock sounds emphasize alternating beats, while other rock tunes in part or whole hammer every beat home. Though he may add fills (short percussion outburst), it is the drummer’s job to keep the force of rock moving with the incessant pulsating and syncopated beat.”¹²

Driving Beat. The heavy emphasis on beat is what distinguishes rock from every other type of music. Quentin Schultze notes: “The heart of rock and roll is rhythm and beat—those twin forces give rock its energy and propel its intentional simple harmony

and melody. The appeal does not lie in harmony, because most rock and roll music consists of no more than four or five very simple cords in a very clearly defined key. Nor does the attraction lie in melody, since the rock and roll vocalist does not so much sing as shouts and wail.”¹³

The first and most important defining and distinguishing characteristic of rock music is its driving, loud, relentless beat. In his book, *The Art of Rock and Roll*, Charles Brown discusses the various types of rock music that have evolved since the days of Elvis Presley. He finds that the common denominator of all the kinds of rock music is its beat: “Perhaps the most important defining quality of rock and roll is the beat, . . . Rock and roll is different from other music primarily because of the beat.”¹⁴

It is critically important to understand that *rock music is different from all other music because of its heavy emphasis on the relentless beat*. This fact is acknowledged by rock musicians. In his book *A Conceptual Approach to Rock Music*, Gene Grier says that “rhythm is the most important and basic element of rock music because of the way in which we relate to it.”¹⁵ He instructs readers on how to write a good rock song, by following the following four steps:

- “1. Decide on a time signature.**
- 2. Decide on a chord progression . . .**
- 3. Write the melody.**
- 4. Write the lyrics.”¹⁶**

This statement is abundantly clear. Rock inverts the correct order of the elements of music by making rhythm and harmony more important than melody and lyrics.

Bob Larson, who prior to his conversion was a successful rock performer on television shows, and entertained capacity audiences in Convention Hall, Atlantic City, explains that the “pulsating beat and fast rhythm will unmistakably identify rock music. . . . Since rock is a hybrid sound of whole traditions of music (jazz, Negro spiritual, country and western, blues), it is hard to assign any one sound as typical. It has become a musical melting pot for many styles, *all centered in the relentless beat*.”¹⁷

The defining role of the relentless beat in rock music explains why its impact is *musically* rather than *lyrically*. As sociologist Simon Frith points out in his book *Sound Effects, Youth, Leisure, and the Politics of Rock ‘n’ Roll*, “A word-based approach is not helpful at getting at the meaning of rock . . . The words, if they are noticed at all, are absorbed after the music has made its mark.”¹⁸

This important fact is ignored by those who argue that rock music is just like any other form of music and thus it can be legitimately adopted for Christian worship by changing its lyrics. The truth of the matter is that *rock music is different from all other kinds of music on account of its relentless beat*. Changing the lyrics does not affect the impact of the music because the beat is still there.

In the light of this fundamental characteristic of rock music, let us ask: Can the driving beat of rock music be legitimately used to sing Christian songs? The answer to this question depends upon the effects of the rock beat upon the human body. If it can be proven that the rock beat has no physical, mental, and spiritual ill effects on humans, then there is no reasons to disapprove its use in Christian songs. On the other hand, if scientific studies indicate that the relentless rock beat alters the mind and excite the organism, then, it is evident that the use of rock beat in Christian songs must be avoided.

The Effects of the Rock Beat. There is a wealth of documentation produced by knowledgeable experts in the field of psychology of music, physiology of music, philosophy of music, and sociology of music, which explains the various negative effects of the rock beat on humans and animals. These experts examine rock music, not from a spiritual, religious perspective, but from social, psychological, and physiological

perspectives. Since chapter 8 deals specifically with the effects of rock music, only few studies will be cited in this context.

Some studies indicate that an important reason why rock music affects the body in a way that is unlike any other type of music, is the unique character of the rock beat, technically referred to as “anapestic beat.” The anapestic beat of rock music consists, as noted earlier, of a weak-strong sequence: da-da-DA. This anapestic beat stops at the end of each bar or measure. It is as if the music stops and then starts again, causing the listener to subconsciously come to an halt at the end of each bar. This is the opposite of the so-called dactylic or waltz-like beat (DA-da-da) which reflects the heartbeat (LUB-dub-rest) and other rhythms of the body.

Psychiatrist Verle Bell offers a graphic explanation of how rock beat causes addiction: “One of the most powerful releases of the fight-or-flight adrenaline high is music which is discordant in its beats or chords. Good music follows exact mathematical rules, which cause the mind to feel comforted, encouraged, and ‘safe.’ Musicians have found that when they go against these rules, the listener experiences an addictive high.

“Like unscrupulous ‘diet’ doctors who addicted their clients to amphetamines to ensure their continued dependence, musicians know that discordant music sells and sells. As in all addiction, victims become tolerant. The same music that once created a pleasant tingle of excitement no longer satisfies. The music must become more jarring, louder, and more discordant. One starts with soft rock, then rock ‘n’ roll, then on up to heavy metal music.”¹⁹

John Diamond is a respected medical doctor, who has conducted extensive research on the impact of music on the human body. His book *Your Body Doesn't Lie* contains a wealth of information on this subject. After a study of over 20,000 records he found that the rock beat affects the body negatively in several ways. For example, he found that the stopped anapestic beat weakens the body because it goes against the normal rhythm of human physiology, thus affecting the heart and blood pressure. The rock beat sets in motion an automatic fight-and-flight response, which causes a secretion of the hormone, epinephrine.²⁰ The body reacts to the beat with muscle weakness, anxiety, and aggressive behavior.

Diamond relates the unexpected way in which he came to research the effects of the rock beat. “Several years ago my research on the effect of music took an unexpected turn. Shopping in the record department of a large New York store, I became weak and restless and generally ill at ease. The place was vibrating with rock music. Later I did the obvious thing—I tested the effect of this music . . . Using hundreds of subjects, I found that listening to rock music frequently causes all the muscles in the body to go weak. The normal pressure required to overpower a strong deltoid muscle in an adult male is about 40 to 45 pounds. When rock music is played, only 10 to 15 pounds is needed.”²¹

In his book *Tuning the Human Instrument*, Steven Halpern reports several studies on how the rock rhythm affects the mind and the body. One of them is similar to the study of Dr. Diamond. He wrote: “Dr. Sheldon Deal, a nationally known chiropractor and author, and by no means an old fuddy-duddy categorically putting down all of Rock and Roll per se, demonstrated the effect of the standard Rock ‘n’ Roll beat on muscle strength of the body. Using tests basic to kinesiology [that is, movement dependent on stimulation], he showed that the rhythm arrangement that we hear all the time in pop music, that is, ‘short-short-Long (---), has a definite weakening effect on the subject’s strength. . . . This effect held true *whether the subject liked the style of music or not*. In other words, how one ‘felt’ about the music, tastewise, was irrelevant in terms of how the body ‘felt’ . . . a common denominator cutting through most subjective reactions is that of sexual arousal.”²²

Other scientific studies have produced similar results. “Researchers at Louisiana State University found that listening to hard-driving rock music increased the heart rates and lowered the quality of workouts in a group of twenty-four young adults. In contrast,

easy-listening or softer music lowered heart rates and allowed for longer training sessions."²³

In another study on the effects of rock music, "Researchers at Temple University found that university students exposed to recordings by the Beatles, Jimi Hendrix, the Rolling Stones, Led Zeppelin, and other similar bands, breathed faster, showed reduced skin resistance to stimuli, and had an increased heart rate compared to those exposed to random background noise."²⁴

Rock Rhythm and Sexual Response. Sexual arousal is one of the best known effects of the rock rhythm. Rock musicians are well aware of this fact and exploit it to their advantage. Gene Simmons of the rock group KISS was asked on *Entertainment Tonight* if parents should be concerned about teens listening to their music. With candid frankness Simmons responded: "They should be concerned because we are into girls—that is what rock is all about—sex with a 100-megaton bomb, the beat."²⁵

The rock beat stimulates sexual responses. In her article "Music, The Beautiful Disturber," published in *Psychology Today*, Anne Rosenfeld points out that music arouses "a range of agitated feelings—tense, excited, sometimes sexual—through pronounced and insistent rhythms, . . . artfully used to heighten the sexual tension . . . drumming may produce these powerful effects by actually driving the brain's electrical rhythms."²⁶

Salem Kirban explains how the rock beat causes a sexual response: "Rock music appeals to the body's glands and sensuous nature. The low frequencies vibrations of the bass guitar . . . the driving beats of the drum have a direct effect on the pituitary glands. The pituitary gland produces hormones that control the sexual responses of male and female. With the incessant beat of rock music, a radical imbalance occurs in the brain. The end effect is an overload of hormones that can cause moral inhibitors either to drop or to be wiped out completely."²⁷

The secretion of the hormone epinephrine, caused by the abnormal stimulus of the rock beat, results in an overstimulation of the sex glands without a normal release. Bob Larson notes that this is "the prelude to the release that will occur in the parked car after the dance, and it is a direct cause of the bodily obscenity that occur on the dance floor. I speak not only from medical counsel, but also from personal observation when I state that girls who erotically give their bodies to the frenzied gyrations accompanying rock rhythms, may be undergoing a sexually climactic condition. . . . We must also realize that unconscious emotion, because of its nature, is influenced by many factors, one of which is vibrations (e. g. the deep bass sound found in rock music). . . .The sex-related emotions generated by the vibrations in the unconscious seek expression in conscious thought and activity. I have observed couples who actually undergo an imaginary sex act in their minds and bodies while dancing. This abnormal, musically induced, simulated orgasm is both psychologically and physiologically destructive. Neurosis is the direct result. It is also sin!"²⁸

Pleasure-oriented Church Music. The capacity of the rock beat to cause a sexual response is a most important factor to be considered by those who wish to adopt sanitized forms of rock music for church worship. Changing the lyrics does not eliminate the effect of the rock beat, because, as we shall now see more fully below, the beat impacts on the body, bypassing the master brain. Ultimately the question is: *Should church music stimulate the people physically or inspire them spiritually?*

We live in a pleasure-oriented society and many have come to expect a pleasurable, self-satisfying experience from church music. Calvin Johansson, an authority on church music and a contributor to this symposium, correctly observes that "when the main criterion for choosing the music used in worship is pleasure, then the music specifically crafted for that purpose becomes the logical choice. In our culture that means the music of pop, with its melody, rhythm, and harmony having but one goal, easy self-

gratification. Whether it be rock 'n' roll, rock, country, contemporary Christian music, heavy metal, new wave, gospel, country rock, swing, or rap, pop is the preferred music of most people."²⁹

As our culture has become increasingly preoccupied with fulfilling personal pleasurable desires, the church is seeking to supply the religious counterpart by utilizing sanitized forms of rock music. Johansson rightly warns that "the result of using religious rock in worship is dangerous: The church service becomes a make-believe fantasy-world used to satisfy the less noble traits of the adamic nature."³⁰

Religious rock music, by whatever name, is hedonistic, and hedonistic music can hardly contribute to build a strong spirituality. "No matter how one might try, or what one believes, musical immaturity does not produce holistic Christian maturity."³¹

The Effects of Rock on the Mind. Rock music affects not only the physical but also the mental processes of the body. Before mentioning a few significant studies on the mental effects of the rock beat, let me share a personal experience. Sometimes ago I was invited to speak at a church where a rock band led out in the singing. It came to me as a surprise to see how the rock beat changed the mood and message of beloved hymns. For example, when the band led out in the singing of "Amazing Grace" with a heavy rock beat, it was not long before the whole congregation was in a swinging, dancing mood. The rock beat had caused the people to forget that the original mood and message of the song, which invites us not to dance for fun, but to contemplate God's amazing grace: "I once was lost and but now I am found, Was blind, but now I see."

The reason the people forgot the mood and message of the song, is simply because the rock beat impacts upon the body, bypassing the mental thinking process. As Christians we need to be aware of the fact that music is perceived through the portion of the brain that receives stimuli for sensations and feelings, *without being first screened by the brain centers involving reason and intelligence.*

This discovery, which was made over fifty years ago and has been confirmed since then by numerous scientists,³² has contributed to the development of music therapy. "Music, which does not depend upon the master brain to gain entrance into the organism, can still arouse by way of the thalamus—the relay station of all emotions, sensations, and feeling. Once a stimulus has been able to reach the thalamus, the master brain is *automatically invaded.*"³³

Two German scientists, G. Harer and H. Harrer, conducted experiments to determine the effect of music on the body. They found that even when the attention of the listener was purposely drawn away from the music, a strong, emotional response was registered on instruments measuring changes in the pulse and breath rates, as well as in the psychogalvanic (electrical) skin reflexes.³⁴

Bob Larson, who studied medicine before becoming a popular rock musician, explains this point with considerable clarity: "The spoken word must pass through the master brain to be interpreted, translated, and screened for moral content. Not so with music—especially with rock music. Such pounding fury can bypass this protective screen and cause a person to make no value judgment whatsoever on what he is hearing."³⁵

Joseph Crow, a researcher at the University of Seattle, conducted an interesting study of the rock culture and its music. He found that "Rock is a use of music based on mathematical formulae to condition the mind through calculated frequencies (vibrations), and it is used to modify the body chemistry to make the mind susceptible to modification and indoctrination. Rock music can be (and is) employed for mindbending, reeducation, and re-organization."³⁶

Several scientific studies have established the negative effects of rock music on the mind. In his study of "Behavioral Kinesiology" [that is, movement dependent on

stimulation], Diamond found that the weak (anapestic) rock beat causes “switched” thinking in the brain. “Using the principles and techniques of Behavioral Kinesology, I have also demonstrated that when the weakening beat is played, the phenomenon called *switching* occurs—that is, symmetry between the two cerebral hemispheres is lost, introducing subtle perceptual difficulties and a host of other early manifestations of stress. *The entire body is thrown into a state of alarm.*”³⁷

Diamond continues explaining more fully the effects of rock music on the mind. “The perceptual changes that occur may well manifest themselves in children as decreased performance in school, hyperactivity, and restlessness; in adults, as decreased work output, increased errors, general inefficiency, reduced decision making capacity on the job, and a nagging feeling that things just are not right—in short, the loss of energy for no apparent reason. *This has been observed clinically hundreds of times.* In my practice I have found that the academic records of many school children improve considerable after they stop listening to rock music while studying.”³⁸

Similar conclusions have been reached by other scientific studies on the effects of rock music on the mind.³⁹ Psychologist Jeffery Arnett found that young people who listened to metal rock music “reported a higher rate of a wide range of reckless behaviors, including driving behavior, sexual behavior, and drug use. They were also less satisfied with their family relationships. Girls who liked heavy-metal music were more reckless in the areas of shoplifting, vandalism, sexual behavior, drug use, and reported lower self-esteem.”⁴⁰

Rock Music and Patty Hearst’s Conversion. One of the most frightening example of the awesome power of rock music to alter the mind is the conversion of Patty Hearst. On February 1974, Patty Hearst was kidnapped by the Symbionese Liberation Army. Shortly after the kidnapping, Patty was caught on video cameras helping the SLA robbing banks. You wonder how they converted her? William Sargant, one of Britain’s foremost experts on brainwashing examined Patty Hearst.

Sargant’s alarming conclusion were reported by *Newsweek*: “She was an unwilling victim of a ‘forced conversion’ or brainwashing. According to Sargant, a person whose nervous system is under constant pressure can ‘inhibit’ and ‘exhibit paradoxical brain activity—bad becomes good and vice versa.’ And that, Sargant argues, is precisely what happened to Patty Hearst. Her nervous system was kept at maximum stress by the *continual playing of loud rock music.*”⁴¹

The capacity of rock music to alter the thinking process of a person like Patty Hearst, making her “an unwilling victim of a forced conversion,” exemplifies the danger of exposing oneself to such music. In his book *Tuning the Human Instrument*, Steven Halpern warns us of this danger with these arresting words: “Rock stars are juggling fissionable material that could blow up at any time.”⁴²

Rock Music is Felt, not Heard. The reason rock music can be so dangerous, is because, as Bob Larson explains with enviable clarity, contrary to other forms of music, rock music “is written to be felt rather than heard. It is performed to dull the attention of the listener. It is not the melodic inventiveness or the chromatic arrangement of the chords that interest the average teenager. Rock performers try to produce a ‘sound’ with the dull, steady, heavy, throbbing, mid-deadening beat. And it is this beat that is captivating so many young people making them easy prey for the lyrics. Other types of music could be found guilty or wrong also, but at present rock music is the most damaging to the young contingent of Americans who are preparing to take the leadership of the country in the years ahead.”⁴³

The subordination of the melodic line in rock music to a pulsating, relentless rhythm, has an hypnotic effect that causes people to lose touch with reality. Bob Larson states: “The steady pounding can cause the mind to go into a state of daydreaming in which it loses touch with reality. This in turn causes the dancer or the listener to lose

touch with the value system related to reality. Any monotonous, lengthy, rhythmic sound induces various stages of trances. It is quite obvious to any qualified, objective observer that teenagers dancing to rock often enter hypnotic trances. When control of the mind is weakened or lost, evil influences can often take possession. Loss of self-control is dangerous and sinful. In a state of hypnosis the mind of the listener can respond to almost any suggestion given it. Such compulsive behavior is indicated by the rising tide of promiscuity and by the increasing rebelliousness of modern youth.”⁴⁴

PART 2 THE CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO ROCK MUSIC

The capacity of rock music to alter the mind and to cause several physical reactions, including sexual arousal, should be of great concerns to Christians. After all Christianity entails a wholistic response to God through the consecration of our mind, body and soul to Him (1 Cor 6:19; 1 Thess 5:23; Rom 12:2). It is through the mind that we offer to God “a rational service” (Rom 12:1; in Greek *logike*) and we make moral, responsible decisions. Scripture summons us to abstain from anything that impairs our mind (1 Pet 1:13; 4:7; Eph 5:18), because through the daily “renewal of the mind” we “put on the new nature, created after the image of God in true righteousness and holiness” (Eph 4:24; cf. Col 3:10; Rom 12:2).

Rock Music Largely Unchallenged. What has been the church response to the challenge posed by the physical and psychological problems caused by rock music? The response has been negligible. Why? Calvin Johansson explains the reason with unusual insight. “The reason the [rock] music has largely gone unchallenged is the subjective notion that the notes, harmony, and rhythm of such songs contain no worldview, moral ethos, or life outlook. It is felt that music does not reflect a moral, philosophical, or theological position. Hence, the church has naively and simplistically split asunder the medium (music) and the message (text). Some Christians have embraced the music of rock (or a derived version of it) while disavowing the text!”⁴⁵

Is such a split feasible? The answer is NO, for three major reasons. First, as we have seen, rock music makes its impact *musically rather than lyrically*. This means that in whatever version rock music is heard, it alters the mind and stimulates the body through its hypnotic beat. Poison kills no matter how it is administered. By the same token the rock beat impacts on the mind and body, whether the lyrics are sacred or secular.

Second, as Johansson puts it, “Christian rock of whatever category is still rock since its message remains the same, now having moved from bars, dance halls, and clubs to the chancel. We have not only given nihilistic rockers a forum to peddle their wares, but we do it for them.”⁴⁶ If a Christian rock band looks and sounds like the secular counterpart, its music can hardly be an alternative because *the sound is the same*. In reality, the Christian band is promoting secular rock, by exposing people to a modified version of it.

Third, the music and the lyrics of rock music are the product of the same worldview, value system, and pantheistic religious experience. The ethos of rock communicated through the music is supported by the text, and vice versa. “There are no rules, There are no laws,” Jim Morrison declares.⁴⁷ “I am an anti-Christ, I am an anarchist,” Johnny Rotten affirms.⁴⁸ The famous art historian H. R. Rookmaaker notes that rock music has emerged “with a thumping rhythm and shouting voices, each line and each beat full of angry insult to all Western values.”⁴⁹ This means that the adoption of rock music in any form represents an endorsement of the social and religious values associated with such music.

An Unholy Alliance. There is today an unholy alliance between the Christian and the secular rock bands. Not only are Christian performers crossing over to the secular market, but so-called Christian magazines are listing and promoting the names of the Christian groups that look and sound like their secular counterpart.

Group, which calls itself *The Youth Ministry Magazine*, often carries a feature known as “CCM: A Sound Alternative.” The list gives the names of the popular secular rock groups, together with the names of the Christian bands that sound alike. The caption reads: “If you like to listen to — Then you’ll probably enjoy —”

In one issue *Group* placed at the top of the list a secular rock group classified as *Punk/Thrash Music*. The name itself indicates the kind of music played by that group.

Several Christian bands are listed as the “CCM Sound Alikes” to this aberrant group. Note what *Newsweek* had to say about the “Christian” sound alike band: “They play the kind of music that parents love to hate. It is loud, disgusting, without redeeming social merit. There are *no melodies, no harmonies*, no singing—just a relentless flood of raunchy, rapped-out lyrics, punched home by a steady barrage of blaring guitars and synthesized beats.”⁵⁰

Can this band that sounds and behaves like its secular counterpart, be legitimately considered a “Christian alternative? The Christian alternative is confront the world with the purity and power of the Gospel, and not to conform to its values and practices.

When the Babylonian captors asked the Israelites to entertain them, saying: “Sing us one of the songs of Zion!” (Ps 137:3), the people responded: “How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land?” (Ps 137:4). Note that the Israelites did not say, “Let us sing them one of our sacred songs that might convert them to the Lord!” No, their response was that they could not sing the Lord’s song to entertain the ungodly. “The Israelites knew it was wrong to take that which belonged to the Lord and profane it by entertaining the unbelievers. Today, not only is the Lord’s song used to entertain the heathen, but the heathen’s music is being employed as the Lord’s song [to entertain the Christians].”⁵¹

Knowing Our Enemy. To successfully meet the challenge of secular influences like rock music, it is imperative for the church to know what it is up against. Wise playing in sports always entails knowing the strengths and weaknesses of the competitors.

The Old Testament prophets knew their opposition, They understood how the cultural influence of the surrounding pagan nations had led God’s people into apostasy and they boldly called upon the people to repent, because God would not tolerate their disobedience. Similarly the New Testament abounds with admonitions not to be “conformed to this world” (Rom 12:2; Eph 6:12; 2 Pet 1 and 2). John admonishes us to “love not the world or the things in the world” (1 John 2:15).

To effectively withstand the cultural pressure of our times and retain our Christian identity, we, like the godly people of Bible times, must understand the perverted values and practices of our culture. In the context of this study, we must understand the true nature of rock music—a music that, as we have seen, embodies a spirit of rebellion against God and the moral principles He has revealed for our lives today.

Reasons for Avoiding Rock Music. A fundamental reason for the church to avoid rock music in any version, is its power to alter the mind. We have found that rock music itself, apart from its lyrics, can alter the mind through its relentless beat. A disciplined Christian life-style calls for the avoidance of mind-altering music or drugs which impairs the mental judgment, thus favoring irresponsible behavior.

In his book *A Return to Christian Culture*, Richard S. Taylor offers a sensible perspective on the Christian choice of music: “There are music forms, whether secular or sacred, which create moods of pensiveness, of idealism, of awareness of beauty, of aspiration, and of holy joyousness. There are other forms of music which create moods of recklessness and sensual excitement. Surely it does not take much judgment to know which forms are most appropriate for religious functions.”⁵²

It is unfortunate that good judgment is often lacking on the part of those who promote the adoption of rocky types of music, even for Christian worship. Most likely these people are not aware of the mental and physical impact of rock music. They ignore that Christian lyrics do not neutralize the sensual effect of the rock beat.

When Christian singers use for their songs the methods employed by rock musicians to make the sound sensual, they “do not realize or deliberately ignore the fact that this is no longer ministry, but pure, sensual, flesh-gratifying entertainment.”⁵³ “When

hymns are so rhythmically irresistible that hand-clapping, dancing, or patty-caking is the routing response, we may be having fun, but such songs are ultimately self-defeating. Any music that has an overbearing rhythmic drive which induces excess and unrestrained bodily response pleasures self. It gives 'me' a rollicking good time. But it lacks the discipline necessary for maturation. When attention is riveted to fleshly response, then church music has succumbed to an infantile self-centeredness."⁵⁴

The Problem with "Crossover" Artists. The lack of spiritual maturity promoted by rock music, in its various versions, may be partly responsible for those Christian artists who crossover into secular rock. This is an easy step to take by those performers who have already been playing the same rock music, though with different words.

The Christian commitment to Christ leaves no room for Christian artists to crossover into the secular rock scene. It is simply a matter of choosing whom they want to serve. Some mistakenly believe that they can worship to god of rock at the concert and the Rock of Ages at the church. Ralph Novak, a music commentator, offers us a fitting example of this trend. He writes for *People* the following perceptive description of a popular crossover Christian performer: "She has made a smooth transition from a rock-tinged gospel to a gospel-tinged rock. She sounds confident and vibrant. For those who like to dance and pray at the same time, her stuff can't be beat."⁵⁵

Can a Christian engage in erotic dancing and praying at the same time? Such mixture of the good-evil mixture is becoming increasingly common today. We must not forget that this was the strategy used by Satan to cause the Fall of man. Speaking of Adam's Fall, Ellen White writes: "By the mingling of evil with good, his mind had become confused, his mental and spiritual powers benumbed. No longer could he appreciate the good that God had so freely bestowed."⁵⁶

The pressure to accept the good-evil mixture is especially felt today in the field of religious music. Lloyd Leno, who prior to his untimely death served as Chairman of the Music Department of Walla Walla University, wrote: "The mass media has so thoroughly conditioned the masses with a diet of dance rhythm-oriented music, that anything but this seems bland and dull. This has resulted in something akin to an obsession among many Seventh-day Adventist gospel music composers and performers to cloth all gospel music with some kind of dance beat. Although some groups are more cautious or 'conservative,' the standard fare of many groups includes thinly disguised hybrid forms of dance styles such as waltz, swing (fox trot), country Western, soft rock, and folk rock. . . . It is quite obvious that these groups are using models whose goals are not compatible with Christian principles."⁵⁷

If Leno was alive today to observe the music scene in some Adventist churches, he would add to the list also "Hard rock." In my itinerant ministry around the world I have been confronted on several occasions with Adventist rock bands playing the kind of hard rock one would expect to hear in night clubs or discos, but not in a church. Such a music would have been strongly condemned in all Adventist churches thirty years ago, but today some members do not see anything wrong with it. Why? Simply because their moral sensitivity has been dulled by the rock music that is blaring everywhere in our society, It is like the frog placed in water that is gradually heated. Eventually she boils to her death without sensing the danger.

Some Christian Recognize the Problem. While some Christians are compromising by adopting modified versions of rock music, there are others who recognize the problem, and break away from such music. It is encouraging to read about the increasing number of Christian churches and recording artists who recognize that some Contemporary Christian Music (CCM) misrepresents Christ in its sound and lyrics. In his book, *At the Cross Road*, Charlie Peacock, an award-winning recording artist, producer, and songwriter of CCM, provides a stirring account of some of the churches and artists

who have recently severed their connection with the CCM because they can no longer compromise their principles.

In November 1997, the People's Church of Salem, Oregon, announced its plans to terminate the Christian music festival, known as "Jesus Northwest," which had drawn capacity crowds for the past 21 years. The announcement came as a surprise in the form of a letter of repentance written by Rev. Randy Campbell, who is the pastor of the People's Church and the festival director. He wrote: "We humbly repent before the Lord and ask for forgiveness of the body of Christ for inadequately representing Christ in our ministry, message, and methods."⁵⁸ The letter acknowledges that much of what is done within the contemporary Christian music industry "(for example, ministry direction, decision-making methods, even the message itself) is often driven by marketing—not the mind of the Lord."⁵⁹

On October 31, 1997, veteran CCM recording artist Steve Camp declared to be "burdened and broken over the current state of CCM," and released an essay in a poster form accompanied by 107 theses entitled "A Call for Reformation in the Contemporary Christian Music Industry." He concludes his essay urging readers to "come away from an industry that has all but abandoned Christ and forge, by God's grace, what it was always meant to be . . . a ministry. Pray on this."⁶⁰

In the Seventh-day Adventist church we have had several successful rock performers who have abandoned altogether the rock scene after joining the church. Two of them, Louis Torres from the USA and Brian Neumann from South Africa, prior to their conversion played in popular rock bands that performed nationally and internationally. Their conversion story is found in chapters 10 and 11 of this symposium. You will be greatly inspired to read how the Holy Spirit convicted their hearts and led them from the addiction to rock music to the worship of the Rock of Ages.

Another person is Rick Shorter, who was former director of the Broadway show "Hair." When he became a Seventh-day Adventist he faced the temptation to compromise. As a professional vocalist and guitarist he felt that he could use his talents by converting old rock songs into new gospel songs. But he decided against it. Rick stated: "At first I thought I could rehash some old rock and soul songs and make them into gospel music. But now I realize there can be no compromise with the world—its music, its entertainment, or its philosophies."⁶¹

As he reflected on his former life which included acquaintances with such popular rock stars as Janis Joplin, Jimmy Hendrix, and Jim Morrison, he gave this warning to young people: "There is absolutely nothing to that kind of life. I just wish that I could get the message across to the kids whose heads are into Rock. They see the surface glitter, not the emptiness inside."⁶²

A Christian Response to Rock Music. In formulating a Christian response to rock music, it is important to remember what we stated at the outset, namely, that the defining characteristic of good music is the balance between three basic elements: melody, harmony, and rhythm. We have found that rock music reverses this order, by making rhythm its dominant element that overshadows the harmony and melody.

Christians should respond to rock music by choosing instead the good music that respects the proper balance among melody, harmony, and rhythm. The proper balance among these three may well correspond to the proper balance in our life among the spirit, mind and body.

In their book *Music in the Balance*, Frank Garlock and Kurt Woetzel, present a concept that was new to me, but which I find very sound. They explain graphically that

**MELODY responds to the SPIRIT
HARMONY responds to the MIND
RHYTHM responds to the BODY⁶³**

The part of music to which the Spirit responds is the melody. This is suggested by Ephesians 5:18-19 where Paul admonishes believers to “be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making a melody.” The parallelism suggests that “making a melody” is equivalent to singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Singing the melody (the tune) of a religious song, not only in church, but also while driving, working, walking, or even taking a shower, expresses our joy and praise to the Lord who fills us with His Spirit.

The part of music to which our mind responds is the harmony. This is because harmony is the intellectual part of music. Virtually anyone can produce a simple melody, but it takes extensive musical training to write and understand the various chords (parts). A good sounding harmony can only be arranged by a trained musician. The harmony, as suggested by the meaning of the word, harmonizes the melody and rhythm together.

The part of music to which the body responds is the rhythm. The word “rhythm” derives from the Greek word *reo*, which means “to flow” or “to pulse” (John 7:38). The rhythm is the pulse of the music which finds an analogical correspondence to the pulse of the heartbeat.

Garlock and Woetzel perceptively suggests that “the analogy between the pulse [of the body] and the rhythm [of the music] will help any desirous Christian to gain discernment in his choice of music.”⁶⁴ To illustrate this concept they provide this helpful chart:

“Too much (or erratic) pulse	Body is sick
Too much (or erratic) rhythm.....	Music is sick
No pulse.....	Body is dead
No rhythm	Music is dead
Pulse under control.....	Body is well
Rhythm under control.....	Music is ‘well’”⁶⁵

The analogy between the pulse of our body and the rhythm of music is recognized by medical doctors. John Diamond, a medical doctor quoted earlier, wrote: “Our bodies have a pulse, and so does music. In a healthy state, we are in touch with our ‘inner pulse,’ which Dr. Manfred Clynes so well describes as ‘the key to the empathy we experience with a composer.’ . . . the phenomenon of the inner pulse . . . is in effect an internally conducted beat.”⁶⁶

Rhythm, as noted earlier in this chapter is the physical part of music. As in the human body the pulsation of the heartbeat must be within a normal range for the body to be well, so in music the rhythm must be balanced for the music to be good. The problem with rock music is that the rhythm or beat dominates in order to appeal primarily to the physical and sensual aspect of human nature.

This physical, sensual impact of the rock rhythm is widely recognized by scholars. In his book *Sound Effects, Youth, Leisure, and the Politics of Rock ‘n’ Roll*, English sociologist Simon Frith emphatically states: “The sexuality of music is usually referred to in terms of its rhythm—it is the beat that commands a direct physical response.”⁶⁷ The same view is clearly expressed in David Tame’s book, *The Secret Power of Music*: “When pulsation and syncopation are the rhythmic foundation of the music at a dance hall, the movements of the dancers can invariably be seen to become very sensual.”⁶⁸

Order in the Christian Life. By stimulating the physical, sensual aspect of the body, rock music throws the order of the Christian life out of balance. Tame often refer to what he calls “one timeless axiom . . . as in music, so in life.”⁶⁹ As Christians we can reverse the axiom and say: “As in life, so in music.” In other words, the order of priorities of

the Christian life with the spiritual first, the mental second, and the physical third, should be reflected in the music itself.

“The Christian who is preoccupied with and spends most of his efforts on the physical (the body), is sensual rather than spiritual. The child of God who exerts most of his energies on improving the mind, to the neglect of his spiritual and physical needs, places undue emphasis on intellectual pursuits. The Christian with a Scriptural order and balance in his life emphasizes the spiritual first (Matt 6:33), the intellectual or emotional second (2 Cor 10:5), and the physical last (Rom 13:14).”⁷⁰

The proper order among the spiritual, mental, and physical aspects of our Christian life, should be reflected in Christian music. Garlock and Woetzel develop this correlation very cogently: “Just as the spiritual considerations of life receive priority by the balanced Christian, so the melody (that part of music to which the spirit responds) must dominate music in the Christian’s life. Similarly, the harmony (that part of music to which the mind and emotions respond) needs to have a supportive role in music, just as the mind and emotions play a secondary role in the Christian experience. Last, and most obvious, the rhythm (that part of music to which the body responds) must be under strict control in music, just as body and its desires need to be disciplined in the Christian’s life.”⁷¹

The challenge we all face in our Christian life is to keep our body in the proper relationship to the mind and spirit. Paul refers to this struggle when he said: “But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified” (1 Cor 9:27; NKJV). Like Paul, we need to discipline our body, by avoiding those things that feed only our carnal nature. We need to cultivate a taste for the right kind of music that respects the proper balance among the melody, harmony, and rhythm. Such music reinforces the proper order of the Christian life among the spiritual, mental, and physical.

There is plenty of traditional and contemporary Christian music that respects the proper balance and reinforces our Christian values. Elsie Landon Buck, President of the International Adventist Musicians Association, provides a sampling of good contemporary music in chapter 9 of this symposium.

CONCLUSION

In the last four chapters we have examined the nature of rock music from a philosophical, historical, religious, and musical perspectives. The conclusions of this investigation can be stated as follows. Philosophically, rock music rejects the Biblical transcendental view of God, promoting instead a pantheistic conception of the supernatural as an impersonal power which the individual can experience through the hypnotic rhythm of rock music, drugs, and sex.

Historically, rock music has gone through an easily-discernible hardening process, blatantly promoting, among other things, a pantheistic/hedonistic worldview, an open rejection of the Christian faith and values, sexual perversion, civil disobedience, violence, satanism, occultism, homosexuality, and masochism.

Religiously, rock music has led to the rejection of the Christian faith and to the acceptance of a new kind of religious experience. The latter involves the use of rock music, sex, drugs, and dance to transcend the limitation of time and space and connect with the supernatural.

Musically, rock music differs from all other forms of music because of its driving, loud, relentless beat. Scientific studies have shown that the rock beat can alter the mind and cause several physical reactions, including sexual arousal.

The factual information we have gathered about the nature of rock music during the course of this investigation, makes it abundantly clear that such music cannot be legitimately transformed into Christian music by changing its lyrics. In whatever version, rock music is and remains a music that embodies a spirit of rebellion against God and the moral principles he has revealed for our lives.

By stimulating the physical, sensual aspect of the human nature, rock music throws the order of the Christian life out of balance. It makes the gratification of the carnal nature more important than the cultivation of the spiritual aspect of our life.

Christians should respond to rock music by choosing instead good music that respects the proper balance among melody, harmony, and rhythm. The proper balance among these three reflects and fosters the order and balance in our Christian life among the spiritual, mental, and physical components of our beings. Good and balanced music can and will contribute to keep our "spirit and soul and body . . . sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess 5:23).

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