

From Rock Music To The Rock Of Ages

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Dear Members of the Endtime Issues Newsletter:

Words fail to express my heartfelt gratitude to all of you who during the past few weeks have taken time to react to my essays on THE CHRISTIAN AND ROCK MUSIC, to encourage me to bring to completion this challenging project, and to share with me some first hand reports on how the introduction of pop music is affecting your local church. I would like to thank also all those who have taken time to express their disagreements with my research. I welcome both the positive and the negative responses, because they all help me to gain a more balanced view of how the issue of rock music is felt in Adventist congregations in different countries around the world.

This newsletter is unusual because it does not consist of my usual Bible Study. Instead I am sharing with you the gripping testimony of Brian Neumann, an accomplished musician and former popular rock player from South Africa. You will find the story of his pilgrimage from rock music to the Rock of Ages, both inspiring and informative. What you will appreciate is not only the vivid style in which Brian describes his various detours from God, but also the practical and sensible advice he offers to those who want to overcome the addiction to rock and make good musical choices.

Brian has written out his testimony as a chapter for the forthcoming symposium on THE CHRISTIAN AND ROCK MUSIC. I thought it would be nice to include a personal testimony on the effects of rock music. During the past two weeks I have received already five excellent essays/chapters from contributors to the symposium. Three more are due by the end of this month, February 29, 2000. With the help of two professional editors from Andrews University Press, we plan to complete the editing process by the end of March. God willing, we hope to mail your personal copy of this timely study by the end of April 2000, that is, as soon as it comes off the press.

The story of how this symposium came together is truly providential. The Lord impressed distinguished music professors and performers from South Africa, Germany, Norway, Australia, and the United States, to contribute chapters to this timely study. Even last week an Adventist Professor, with a graduate degree from Yale University and a Ph. D., in musical arts from the University of Arizona, contacted me about the possibility of contributing a chapter on THE MORALITY OF MUSIC. I hope that he can meet the deadline by the end of this month. This past week I received two chapters from Prof, Calvin Johansson, a recognized authority on church music and author of two classics *Music and Ministry* and *Discipling Music Ministry: Twenty-first Century Directions*. You will find his chapters most insightful.

GROWING ACCEPTANCE OF RELIGIOUS ROCK

The messages and the literature I am receiving every day, clearly indicate that an increasing number of Adventist churches are adopting contemporary pop music for their church services. For the sake of brevity let me share just one message and one quote from the latest issue of *MINISTRY* (February 2000) I received today.

The message comes from an Adventist fellow believer who writes: "Our church had a pastor who was with us for about eight years. When he accepted the position, we had over 600 members and the church was generally full during the church service on Sabbath morning. After about three years he and his wife (who was an associate pastor), began to slowly and carefully introduce the celebration style of worship. . . . The music was so loud that it was easy to hear in the church breeze way. I even visited with the pastor on more than one occasion and discussed the music with him telling him that I had traveled the US a lot and well meaning business acquaintance had taken me to hotel lounges for dinner where the same kind of music was played. In my view such music is entirely inappropriate for Sabbath School or Church service. But all my efforts were of no avail. That pastor was replaced when the church attendance had dropped to 150 or less. The new pastor continued the celebration/rock services even more vigorously until he was replaced a few months later, after Sabbath attendance dropped to 80 or less. I thank God that our current pastoral staff is not deeply into that type of worship and I appreciate your detailed studies of rock music."

Reports such as this sadden my heart. It is evident that not all our Adventist churches are prepared to adopt the rock medium which is associated with sex, drugs, and violence. One wonders, Why is our Adventist Church being rocked today by religious rock music? I believe that part of the problem is the lack of understanding of **THE BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES OF CHURCH MUSIC**. Incidentally, this is the very title of my next chapter, which I hope to email you with the next newsletter.

To illustrate my point, let me briefly refer to an article entitled "Worship and Praise: One Model for Change in the Worship Hour," which appears in the latest issue on *MINISTRY* (February 2000). The author proposes a strategy for gradually introducing contemporary pop music in our Adventist worship service, without causing undue conflicts. His rationale consists of two major arguments, to which I will briefly respond.

1. **Contemporary pop music helps churches to grow.** The author argues that studies indicate that "Baby Boomers have been heavily influenced by music with a beat. Only six percent listed classical music as music of their choice, with a bias against organ music. Overheads have replaced hymn books; synthesizers have replaced organs; and drums and guitars have taken their place in the repertoire of church music instrumentation" (p. 17).

Simply stated, the argument runs like this: Baby Boomer are addicted to the rock beat, other churches have adopted the rock idiom with success, it is wise for our Adventist Churches to adopt what has proven to help other churches grow. To support this argument the author appeals to Paul's "formula for church growth," namely: "come down to people's level and meet their needs without sacrificing the integrity of truth (1 Cor 9:20)."

My Response. The fundamental flaw with this argument is the notion that the end justifies the means. The syllogism runs like this:

Baby Boomers respond to the rock beat,
Churches that have adopted the rock beat for their worship are growing,
Adventist churches should adopt the same contemporary music for their worship service in order to grow.

There is no question that the religious rock attracts people. Huge crowds attend Rock Gospel Concerts. Rather the question is: **Does the MEDIUM of religious rock correctly communicates the MESSAGE of the Gospel?** My answer is NO! These

are my reasons. To be biblical the message of the Gospel must be biblically received. This means that it must impact first the mind and then the emotions. The Gospel commission is to “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, . . . *teaching* them to observe all that I commanded you.” (Matt 28:19-20). The principles and precepts of the Gospel must be **taught** through preaching, and instruction. They cannot be **caught** through pop music and entertainment.

This explains why in the whole Bible there is not a single example of music being used as the means to reach the unsaved. Paul, the great Apostle to the Gentiles, whose strategy was to become all things to all men in order that he may save some (1 Cor 9:22), never considered using modified forms of the “unprecedented modal and rhythmic variety”¹ of the Greek choral songs, or of Roman plays, to introduce the gospel to the masses. Instead he chose to present the Gospel in clear, intelligent, and persuasive words, for “it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe” (1 Cor 1:21).

Paul understood the fundamental truth that the acceptance of the Gospel entails a separation from the world “by the renewal of your *mind*” (Rom 12:2). Do the various varieties of religious rock music today invite young people to separate from the world through the renewal of their *mind*? Hardly so. Pop music appeals primarily to the body rather than the mind; it cultivates a taste for secular rock rather than for sacred music; it communicates a message of solidarity with the world, rather than separation from it. A compelling example is the testimony you are about to read of Brian Neumann

Larry Norman, a superstar in the CCM scene, acknowledges that “In order to decide whether Christian music has any weakness or strengths you have to decide what its purpose is. If it is for non-Christians—to convince them that Christ is an important alternative to seek in their life—then most Christian music is a failure because *it does not convincingly communicate that particular message.*”² Indeed, the message it communicates is one of conformity to the world, rather than separation from it.

A second important reason why the idiom of pop music is unsuitable to communicate the Gospel, is the fact that the **medium affects the message**. To put it differently, the medium used to win the Baby Boomers determines the nature of the message to which they are won. If the church uses an entertainment type of rock music, which is associated with sex, drugs, and violence, it obviously will not be able to challenge these people with the moral claims of the Gospel.

The New Testament summons us to present clearly and compellingly the holiness of God’s character, the desperate human plight, and the amazing grace of the Gospel. These are issues of life and death which cannot be presented with the frivolity and flippancy of pop music.

Listeners to religious rock will never be humbled by the majesty of God, nor will they be convicted of God’s moral claims upon their lives. The relentless rock rhythm, the movements, the lights, and the demeanor of pop singers, contain so much that is sensual and sexually suggestive, that it can hardly communicate the holiness and purity of the Kingdom of God.

If we adopt a worldly appearance to attract the crowd, how can we paint in vivid colors the contrast between the kingdom of this world and the Kingdom of God? Paul recognized that the Gospel cannot be proclaimed through deceptive worldly gimmicks. Thus he told the Corinthians: “My speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom [or we might say ‘with the exciting sounds of Greek songs’], but in the demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith may not rest in the wisdom of men [or we might say ‘in worldly excitements’], but in the power of God” (1 Cor 2:4-5).

The content and style of church music should differ markedly with the music used for entertainment. Its function should be to honor God and not to pleasure self. Time and gain the Scripture invites us to “worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness” (1

Chron 16:20; cf. Psalm 29:2; 96:9). Ezekiel complained because the religious leaders of his time "made no distinction between the holy and the common, neither have they taught the difference between the clean and unclean" (Ezek. 22: 26).

The blurring of the distinction between "the holy and the common" is particularly present in our secular society because has largely lost a sense of the sacred. Church music can be an effective means to help people recapture a sense of the sacred, because it summons believers to exalt and praise the holiness, majesty, and purity of God.

"Music about God should be like God. It should reflect Him, magnify Him; it should communicate something of God's character. Does it do this? Is it pure in tone, lovely in its melody? Fine-tuning the question to the subject of our study, does rock music do it?"³ The answer is self-evident.

2. The Bible supports the use of religious rock. The second argument is that the Bible supports the use of religious rock because "David and others who wrote the Psalms . . . sang accompanied by tambourines and cymbals and trumpets, ecstasy filled the air (Ps 145-150)" (*Ministry* p. 17).

This is the same argument developed in the symposium *Shall We Dance*, produced by 20 Adventist authors and published by La Sierra University Press. "We can dance to the Lord like David, reflecting an outburst of excitement for the glory of God; or we can introspectively turn that excitement inward, reflecting on ourselves and our selfish desires" (p. 94).

My response. Is this what the Bible teaches that we can dance to the Lord like David with tambourines, cymbals, and trumpets? What distresses me is the flippancy with which the Bible is quoted to support personal agendas. My appeal to those who wish to quote the Bible is to study first all what the Bible has to say.

In the case of David, let me mention two points. The first, which was developed in the previous newsletter (no. 37), is that David himself who organized the Temple choir, clearly excluded dancing and tambourines from the music of Temple. Please reread carefully the previous newsletter on "An Adventist Theology of Church Music."

The second point has to do with the dancing of David and will be developed in the next newsletter on "BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES OF CHURCH MUSIC." You should find this to be an enlightening Bible Study. For the time being, let me simply say that the example of David dancing before the ark, can hardly be used to justify dancing or swinging to the beat or rock music in the church.

The reason is simple. David hardly gave a good example when he danced before the ark. First, he wore the "linen ephod" (2 Sam 6:14), which only the high priest was allowed to wear. Second, he stripped himself of his clothes and danced naked to the embarrassment of his wife, who told him: "How the king of Israel honored himself today, uncovering himself before the eyes of his servants' maids, as one of the vulgar fellows shamelessly uncovers himself?" (2 Sam 6:20). What is even more distressing is David's arrogant answer to his wife: "I will make myself yet more contemptible than this, and I will be abased in your eyes" (2 Sam 6:22).

The question we need to ask is: Can the example of David who made himself contemptible by dancing naked in the streets of Jerusalem be used as a worthy example to justify the use of beat music in the church? It saddens me to read the constant appeal to the example of David by those who have not taken time to read the whole story. Please note David's example is not prescriptive of what we should do, but descriptive of what we should avoid. This is one of the issues examined in the next newsletter, which is an important chapter of the symposium on THE CHRISTIAN AND ROCK MUSIC.

ENDNOTES

1. Geoffrey Chew, "Song," *The New Grove Dictionary of Musical Instruments*, vol. 17, p. 512.
2. Larry Norman, *Solid Rock*, p. 28.
3. John Blanchard, *Pop Goes the Gospel. Rock in the Church* (Durham, England, 1991), p. 161.

FROM ROCK MUSIC TO THE ROCK OF AGES

By Brian Neumann

My spiritual pilgrimage from rock music to the Rock of Ages is a painful story of addiction, self-destruction, and final redemption. Sharing this painful experience is like opening a wound that is healing. Yet it is my hope that this pain can have a healing effect in my life and a redeeming influence on the life of others.

I was born in Malawi, Africa, on 25 March 1961, after Bill Haley and “The Comets” burst onto the scene in the fifties with “Rock Around the Clock.” At that time, no one dreamed that rock ‘n’ roll would, indeed, rock till the hands of the prophetic clock struck midnight. Bible students who look down the prophetic unfolding of the end-time signs can sense more than just the irony behind this statement by Nick Paul: “Perhaps rave truly is the music at the end of the world.”¹

From the early pioneer days of Elvis, Little Richard, and a whole host of other pop-rock celebrities to the present trends of rap, tecno, and rave, we can still feel, almost to the very core of our bones, the “*shake, rattle, ‘n’ roll*” of that driving essence behind nearly all forms of popular music—the beat.

How Rock Music Entered My Life

Born into the home of a Seventh-day Adventist missionary couple, in the heart of Africa, it seems absurd that I, their youngest son, would ever find my way into the world of rock. Yet it happened. By the time I had reached the age of three, we had moved near Cape Town, South Africa, and my mom and dad were divorced. I felt rejected and cheated; and the circumstances of my life were just right for me to begin taking a course that would lead me further and further from the faith of my birth. Let me tell you how it all began.

Until 1976, we did not have television in South Africa. Thus, my early exposure to popular music was through radio and the records that my friends bought and shared with me. I come from a fairly protected environment in my Adventist home, so I was seldom exposed to the sounds of rock music. My introduction to rock music was very gradual. One song led to another, and soft rock led to heavier rock.

In a short time my natural love for music and art was channeled into the swirling, psychedelic “pipedream” of 70s rock. Instead of the meek and lovely Jesus, my new heroes were pop stars who came and went as pawns in the hands of Satan—Jimi Hendrix, The Rolling Stones, Pink Floyd, Uriah Heep, Led Zeppelin, Carlos Santana, and Deep Purple, to name a few. They became my role models. They took drugs, so I took drugs. They were obsessed with sex in their dark existence, so I made sex a driving force of my life, also. Some rock stars dabbled in the occult, so I, too, became fascinated with the Devil. By the time television hit South Africa in the mid 70s, my mind was made up. I would no longer live according to the values my family had taught me.

Rock music soon became my heart and soul, the ultimate language to express my values, goals, and lifestyle. As for countless other young people, rock music became the medium through which I could express my rebellion against the values of my family, the church, and society.

In a relatively short time, I became hooked to the “groove,” to the whole idea and philosophy that drove the thundering freight train of rock. My mind and body became completely captivated. I was captured by the power, the clothes, the fame, and the sheer global presence of the rock revolution.

My addiction to rock music became so strong that I desperately sought to satisfy my craving by constantly listening to, feeling, and feeding on the hypnotic beat. Soon I found myself almost bodily severed from the world and religious faith of my parents. A

new era, a new culture, had taken center stage in my life—as it has done in the lives of many others.

A Life of Rebellion and Isolation

The rebellion and isolation that rock music brought to my life gave prophetic realism to the words of rock star David Crosby: “I figured the only thing to do was to swipe their kids. By saying this I’m not talking about kidnapping, I’m just talking about changing the value system, which removes them from their parents’ world very effectively.”²

Rock music did remove me effectively from my parent’s world. Before I was out of my teens, I had run away from boarding school, run away from home, been arrested by the police for drugs and theft and fought, sometimes physically, with fellow students and teachers. My mother’s heart was broken. At that time, it was hard for her to see any light at the end of the tunnel, yet she persevered in constant prayer and faith, trusting that some day a radical change would occur.

Even if I had understood the mind-bending power of rock music, most likely it wouldn’t have made any difference. I still would have chosen against any better judgment to do “my own thing.” Doing “*your own thing*,” of course, is an oxymoron, because “doing your own thing” invariably entails following the dictates of popular trends. Most kids who tell their parents, “*I want to do my own thing*,” are saying in reality that they want to do what the other kids are doing. They don’t want to be the odd ones out.

In my case, doing my own thing meant expanding my recently discovered musical talents into the psychedelic world of popular music. My dream was to learn to play the guitar, which I was doing with haste, so that I could work my way into the glamorous world of ‘sex, drugs, fashion, and rock ‘n’ roll.’ Of course, I knew—or thought I knew—that this was what it was all about. The advertising, the lyrics, the fashion, and the lifestyle of my heroes sent a loud and clear message. The manager of the Rolling Stones once stated unequivocally: “Rock IS sex. You have to hit teenagers in the face with it!”³ Without question, rock hit me with full force.

It is well-known that rock ‘n’ roll is deeply ingrained in sex and the avenues of the occult. For example, in 1994, two issues of the South African metal magazine, *Ultrakill*, carried a back-page article entitled, “The Truth about the Devil.” It stated: “We’ve got Satan, Beelzebub, Satan, the Serpent, and lord of misrule. There is a musical connection with all of this. Even before heavy metal, the Devil took an interest in rock ‘n’ roll. The very term rock ‘n’ roll started life as a Black American expression for sex. And sinful procreation has been the Devil’s province for a long, long time.”⁴

How Rock Music Rocked My Life

For those who do not understand the mechanisms at work in rock, it is difficult to perceive how something as apparently innocuous as music can have such life-altering effects on those who expose themselves to its influence. Right from the very beginning, I sensed the effects of rock on my mind and body.

Years later, I learned the scientific reasons for the physiological and psychological effects of rock music. Discovering these scientific reasons was no real enlightenment to me. I had already lived and experienced the hypnotic mind-bending power of rock. All that I learned, and am still learning, just serves to corroborate what I painfully experienced during those years I spent listening to and performing rock music.

I was first exposed to heavy rock in the early 1970s. It immediately grabbed my attention and it was impossible for me to break away from it. I religiously was absorbing the relentless, pulsating beat of rock. It caused an incredible adrenaline rush in my body and evoked the feeling of reckless abandon and fearless confidence. I knew, even then, that barring a divine act, I would never be liberated from its grip on my life.

Suddenly, everything became possible, and not only possible, but also acceptable. This was the age of free sex and drugs promoted by the world of rock. I wanted to be a part of this dreamworld. The music had a strange ability to break down the walls of resistance in my mind and opened me up to the idea of drug experimentation and a whole host of other things. The music itself had become a drug to me.

In reality, I didn't need any other mind-altering substances. The music itself created a "high" of its own. Of course, this did not diminish my need for other 'real' drugs. Rock only increased my desire to push the adrenaline high to its outer limits. The combination of rock and dangerous narcotics made it possible to reach ecstatic "highs." That which had been wrong suddenly became right; that which was right became either boring or wrong. It is hard to believe how rock and drugs can impair and even destroy one's moral conscience.

From the early days of rock, all of the big stars have known that rock music has the ability to hypnotize and weaken the moral resistance of people. Jimi Hendrix himself explicitly stated: "Atmospheres are going to come through music, because music is a spiritual thing of its own. You can hypnotize people with the music and when you get them at their weakest point, you can preach into the subconscious what you want to say."⁵

Rock music and popular culture preached to my subconscious that nothing was wrong with pre-marital sex. The result became evident in 1980; one year after finishing high school, my girl friend became pregnant and gave birth to a baby girl. Indeed, having children out of wedlock is one of the most common characteristics in rock culture. The very terminology connected with the rock culture has strong sexual or demonic overtones. For example, the terms *jazz*, *rock 'n' roll*, *groovy*, *mojo*, *funky*, and *boogie* all have sexual or demonic overtones.

Climbing the Rock Ladder

After the birth of our daughter, which we gave up for adoption, I was busy establishing myself on the local music scene in South Africa. "Front Page" was the name of the band I was with, and we were appearing on television. Our music was played on some of the popular radio stations. We were touring and performing, and having radio and newspaper interviews. To all intents and purposes, we were climbing the ladder to the "top of the stack."

Drugs had become a natural part of my life, and my interest in the occult which had begun in my youth was by now a full-blown obsession. Astrology, numerology, and other occult practices became the order of the day. Although I was climbing the ladder to rock success, I was falling fast into the downward spiral of rock 'n' roll outer darkness.

By the age of fourteen, I had had my first encounter with the spirit world. My Seventh-day Adventist background made me forcefully aware of the fact that I was playing with fire, but the desire for the fame, money and high life of the popular rock culture had become so overpowering that I was ready to sell my soul for the opportunity to be a part of it.

This was literally the price I was prepared to pay. One day in my room at Helderberg High School I poured my heart out to my lord—but my lord was no longer Christ. I made a promise to the Devil that if he helped me to fulfill my dream, I would give my life to his service.

Germany: From the Top to the Bottom

In 1980 I was becoming known in the professional field of popular music. For a time I performed with the popular local band Trapeze. Soon I was invited to join the prestigious Front Page, and through the group I established a strong friendship with Manlio Celloti, a leading Italian producer of HI-Z Studios in Cape Town. Celloti was

instrumental in forming a new three-member band which became known as “The Reespect.” Two members of the band had performed with The Boys—a popular band that had a hit with the song called “Fire.”

After a year in the studio recording music for new albums, we were invited to perform in Germany. In February 1986, I found myself on a flight to Europe and to new horizons in my pursuit of musical euphoria. I met there with the other two band members and Manlio, our new producer and our manager.

Within three months of arriving in Germany, our rock band The Reespect signed a contract with *Polydor Records* in Hamburg. (We inserted the extra ‘e’ in the name of our band in order to give it a luckier numerical value.) This prestigious record company handled record releases for such bands as The Beatles, Level 42, Chris de Burg, and many other famous rock bands.

In 1986, Polydor released our first album “She’s so Mystical” and then “Mamma Mia.” The release of these albums opened new doors of opportunity for us. We were invited to appear on a German LP compilation of various hits with such artists as Janet Jackson and Elton John.

Our keyboard player, Thomas Bettermann, had come from the famous international jazz ensemble Volger Kriegel, Mild Maniac. He became a regular part of all our composition and studio work. In September 1986, we were flown from Cologne to Hamburg for a major recording convention. At the airport, we were met by a Polydor’s representative in an oversized black limousine. It looked like we were on our way to the “big time.”

Life became a constant mirage of performances, studio sessions, interviews, women, drugs, and more drugs. By this time, my moral state had deteriorated to such a point that no type of vice was beyond me. The success of our recordings caused dissension among our band members, our egos clashed, and our different musical ideas, which had worked to our advantage initially, now began to pull us apart. Eventually we broke up.

I launched into a solo career that found me in more studios doing session work. Session work is like free-lance performance where one is hired to do recording or live performance for different bands or studios. With this change, my drug intake increased.

As you can imagine, by this time my life had turned into moral wreckage. Paradoxically, in my twisted New Age concept of religion, I thought I had reached a kind of spiritual nirvana. In reality, I was scraping the bottom of spiritual darkness. Faintly, at times, I would glimpse the rays of true light that would flicker in and I would grasp pathetically at them, only to let them go and then find that the light was getting dimmer and dimmer.

It was at this time in my career that, after a marathon studio session and a huge drug binge, I one day found myself face down on a cold bathroom floor in the home of a female vocalist in Hamburg. I was drowning in my own vomit, fighting for my life, and calling out to the God of my youth whom I had long since neglected.

This was the most important life/death struggle of my life. For hours I fought against the clutches of darkness that threatened to engulf me. My body was loaded with four days of hash, speed, cocaine, and heroin. Had it not been for God’s compassion and providential help, the battle for my life would have been lost right then. But God heard my cry of desperation and, though I deserved no grace, He snatched me from the edge of the precipice and gave me another chance.

The Return to South Africa: A New Beginning

Something happened that day in Hamburg, Germany. My helpless condition made me realize that there is only one God and only one true way to life and happiness. I

sensed that in His mercy God was willing to forgive my sinful past and accept me back like the Prodigal Son. My spiritual journey had taken an important turn, but this was only the beginning of a tortuous journey. Many times I experienced a relapse into rock music before I gained complete freedom from its addiction.

The first important step I took was to cancel all my previously accepted engagements for recording and performing in Germany. I decided to return to South Africa to start my new life. Unfortunately, my sudden decision disappointed and hurt quite a few people. My Swedish girlfriend, my producer, and my flat mate were all affected by my urge to “just get out.”

But the peak of the mountain remained hidden from sight. The seventeen years I had spent performing rock and doing drugs had taken its toll. Looking back, I realize that not only the drugs and decadent lifestyle had consumed my body. The most important factor in the equation was the rock music itself that instigated all sorts of evil in my life.

It is impossible to describe the devastating effects of rock music on my spiritual, moral, and physical life. The rock beat, apart from the lyrics, attacked all the sensibilities of my organism with a relentless demonic force. This has been true not only for me, a relatively unknown individual, but for all the countless numbers of celebrated victims in the massive swimming pool of rock ‘n’ roll.

The famous rock star David Bowie, with almost prophetic insight, warned: “I believe rock ‘n’ roll is dangerous, it could very well bring about a very evil feeling in the West . . . it’s got to go the other way now, and that’s where I see it heading, bringing about the dark era. . . . I feel that we are only heralding something even darker than we are. Rock ‘n’ roll lets in lower elements and shadows that I don’t think are necessary. *Rock has always been the Devils music, you can’t convince me that it isn’t.*”⁶

Numerous rock stars have spoken unequivocally about the destructive effects of the rock beat on the human organism. John Lennon himself stated: “Rock ‘n’ Roll is primitive and has no bull. . . . It gets through to you. Its beat comes from the jungle—they have rhythm.”⁷

Punk Rock manager Malcolm McLaren declared: “Rock ‘n’ Roll is pagan and primitive, and very jungle, and that’s how it should be! The moment it stops being those things, it’s dead . . . the true meaning of rock is sex, subversion, and style.”⁸

From Hard Rock to Christian Rock

The return to my native South African soil left many loose ends untied overseas. These problems did not worry me because I was determined to break away from my sinful past and forge a new life. I decided to follow the example of Contemporary Christian Musicians by using my musical talent and a modified version of rock music as a witnessing tool.

Instead of perverted lyrics, I began writing songs with a strong prophetic, spiritual message that was biblically based. The style of music was a mixture of funk, rock, rap, and commercial pop. Like many other CCM artists, I believed I could especially reach the younger generation by presenting to them the message of the Gospel through the rock medium which they readily recognized and accepted.

Here I liken my musical compromise to a customized car. The interior of my vehicle was done up in the fabric of a Christian message, the body work was graffitied with the dazzling paintwork of rock ‘n’ roll, and the windows were tinted with the dark shadows of semi-spiritual blindness. No one could really see inside the vehicle I was driving. I never realized, at the time, how inadequate my spiritual vision was.

Then, however, I sincerely felt that the Lord was leading me in a new avenue of service for Him. The reasoning and logic behind my choices and the decisions I was

making appeared deeply sincere and coherent to me, and the encouragement I received from those who were blessed by my ministry confirmed my convictions.

Like Paul, I wanted to become “all things to all men, that I might by all means save some” (1 Cor 9:22). This logic is used today by Christian artists who create modified versions of rock music to witness to the world. Unfortunately, they fail to understand that to become all things to all men does not mean to compromise the purity and principles of the Gospel.

Nowhere does the Bible suggest that to effectively witness to the world we must use the world’s methods. On the contrary, the Bible teaches: “Do not be mismatched with unbelievers. For what partnership have righteousness and iniquity?” (2 Cor 5:14). The application of this principle calls for courage to dissociate from the various forms of evil promoted by rock music.

Once one accepts that the road to compromise is always progressive, then one must recognize sin in his or her life for what it really is. And when convicted of sin, the next step is repentance. Once one has repented, all would seem like a load of emptiness if that repentance were not accompanied by true conversion—the putting off of the old and the taking on of the new.

To experience the renewing power of the Holy Spirit, we need to heed His convicting voice and toss out the garbage hidden in our closet in order to make room for purity and holiness. James reminds us that “Friendship with the world is enmity with God. Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God” (Jam 4:4). It took me time to learn this important lesson. Needless to say, my pilgrimage from rock music to the Rock of Ages was a rocky one.

Changing the Lyrics Is Not Enough

When I left my rock-music career behind to begin composing and performing “Christian Rock,” much had changed in my life. However, the very thing that had captured me in the first place still remained. I was addicted to the rhythm of rock music itself. It had chained me down more than all my other vices put together. The lyrics are very important, but the most powerful element of rock music is its beat.

So many Christian artists try to justify the use of rock in Christian services by the futile, illogical attempt of changing the lyrics. That had become my pitfall, too. I failed to realize that I could not legitimately reach the secular world by using a language that has been proven to be disastrous.

Christ mixed with the outcasts in order to reach them, but He never once sacrificed His moral principles to attract those He was ministering to. He did not dress like a prostitute in order to reach one. He never became a drunkard to reach the alcoholics. He did not practice dishonesty to please the tax collectors. He did not sing sensual music in order to excite people physically. In all circumstances, He set an example of pure, refined, and unblemished conduct. It was His life of purity and integrity combined with the convicting power of the Holy Spirit that touched the lives of so many.

Secular Rock and “Christian” Rock

In spite of contrary claims, no significant difference exists between secular rock music and its “Christian” version. Why? Simply because both share the same musical rhythm and are driven by the same relentless beat. Contemporary Christian Music in its rock, rap, rave, jazz, metal, or related forms shares the same accentuated, syncopated, and persistent rhythm of the “rock beat.” Other aspects may also be shared, but the beat is the real heart and soul of it.

Irrespective of its lyrics, Contemporary Christian Music that conforms to rock’s essential criteria in any sense cannot be legitimately used for church worship. The reason

is simple. The impact of rock music, in whatever version, is through its music, and *not through its lyrics*.

Some argue that so-called “Soft Rock” should not be placed in the same category as the other harder forms of rock. This is not true. A lot of soft rock, although slower in nature, still carries a consistent, syncopated beat and often overaccentuates it. Another important point to consider is the expression, atmosphere, and delivery of soft rock.

Lyrics sung in a breathy, over-sentimental tone suggest an atmosphere of love or lust between a man and woman. These hardly provide an appropriate medium to express love to a Holy God. I am not talking only about lyrics here, but also of atmosphere and tone. All words, whether spoken or sung, are delivered in a unique tone to convey a special intent.

Music designed to express love for Jesus, should conform to what the Greeks call *agape*—love, which is unselfish, and not to what is termed *eros*—love, which is erotic and self-centered. When choosing our Christian music today, we have to exercise great care and discernment because not everything that comes with a Christian label attached to it is necessarily Christian. This is true even if it does not have a heavy beat.

Music as an Evangelistic Crutch

Contemporary Christian Music is seen by many as an effective medium to convert people to Christ. Surprisingly, however, nothing in the Bible or in the history of the church indicates that music was ever used as an evangelistic tool. The primary function of music is to worship and praise God. It is the lack of faith in the power of the Holy Spirit that has made music for many an essential crutch for evangelizing unbelievers and entertaining believers. *The result is that our worship services are becoming spirited rather than spiritual.*

Some have supplanted the power of the Holy Spirit with the hypnotic spirit of music. They have been so blinded by the magical power of popular music that they now eagerly accept the lie as if it were the truth. I speak frankly on the deceptive power of rock music in all its forms, because I have been deceived by the same lie and know exactly how easy it is to fall into this trap.

Had I retained Contemporary Christian Music as one vital link to the world of rock, it would have been just a matter of time before I would fool myself into “comfortable Christian compromise” or fall right back into the world of secular rock once again. Only a radical break from rock music cured me from this addiction. It took me years to learn that lesson.

From “Christian Rock” Back to Secular Rock

My radical break from rock music was a gradual process, especially since upon returning to South Africa I had embarked on a “Christian” rock ministry. This lingering attachment to rock music proved to be my downfall. Slowly I slipped back into milder drugs. I convinced myself that marijuana was not so bad because it is a natural drug, used ritually by indigenous native tribes as a peace-inducing herb. I began compromising also on the kind of music I was performing. The compromise was easy because all I had to do was change the lyrics. The music style remained the same. In spite of my good intentions, I found myself gradually spiraling back into complete darkness.

Very quickly I reestablished my rock career in Cape Town. By 1989 I became recognized as one of the national top guitarists and was respected as a competent songwriter. I became very active on the local, live-music scene, building up a following of people who enjoyed my technical rock-guitar style and who were looking for something new and original. Weeks turned into months, months became years, and the endless cycle of clubs, drugs, and socializing all but killed the spark of hope that once was ignited in a foreign land.

Paradoxically, spirituality still remained an important aspect of my life. I could spend hours writing about the depths to which I had sunk, while still convincing myself that I was having some deep spiritual experience. One reason was that I had sworn I would never get involved with heavier drugs again, like cocaine and LSD. But somewhere along the line, that promise was broken.

At some parties and during moments of willful weakness, I began sharing a line of cocaine or two, a cap of acid here and there, and a spot of hash if it were available. The compromises became endless and covered almost every aspect of my existence, which in essence was encapsulated in that well worn-out rock 'n' roll slogan, "*Sex and drugs and rock 'n' roll.*"

The Second Turning Point of My Life

In 1992, I experienced the second turning point. The Lord used two persons to influence my life in a tangible and permanent way. One of them was Sue, the young lady who eventually became my wife. The other was the baby girl given up for adoption at birth and who I had dreamed of meeting for many years.

I met Sue for the first time in 1988 in Cape Town, at a live concert in which I was performing. We met again a year later at a restaurant where she was a waitress, not realizing that we were the same two people who had met a year before. Both times we were attracted to each other.

In 1990, almost two years after meeting Sue, I had the opportunity of meeting my daughter who had been adopted almost ten years earlier by an Adventist family, Pastor Tinus Pretorius and his wife Lenie. I immediately fell in love with my daughter Leonie, as her adoptive parents had named her. I could see so much of myself in her, and felt a strange, new emotion that I had never experienced before.

Under normal circumstances, such a meeting would never have taken place. When a child is given up for adoption, the biological parents lose their rights to see her or him again. But the kindness and caring attitude of this pastor and his wife cannot be overestimated. Within less than a year of their first visit with me, they moved with my daughter down to Cape Town. Pastor Tinus was assigned to two local Seventh-day Adventist churches. This new relationship had a tremendous impact on my life, causing me to consider once again my destitute spiritual condition.

Right at this time, I received an offer from a lady friend with strong connections to the music industry in Los Angeles to continue my music career in the United States. The potential opportunities were too tempting to turn down, and I made all the necessary arrangements to leave at the earliest opportunity. But God had other plans for my life.

Sue learned about a prophecy seminar being held near our home. We decided to attend the meetings. I was hoping to learn something new that I could use in the music recording that I was working on.

At the prophecy seminar, I learned far more than I bargained for. As a result of those meetings, I canceled my ticket and travel arrangements to the United States. Within two months, Sue and I were baptized into the Adventist church. Everything seemed to be just right. The new-found truths satisfied our deepest convictions. Yet, just three months later, we were out of the church. Rock music was still in my soul. Once again, I was performing on a stage across the country with my electric guitar slung around my neck, churning out the message of rock 'n' roll to captive audiences wherever I went.

No misery is worse than knowing the truth and yet running away from God's sanctifying power. Rebellion, compromise, and sorrow followed the few steps I had taken toward Christ. But I thank God that He never gave up on me. In spite of my timid steps toward Christ, I had not been willing to be broken on the Rock.

The Final Turning Point

It is hard to believe how many times I relapsed into the rock scene before gaining permanent freedom. I had once again compromised myself right back into my previous existence as a rock musician. The only way I knew to survive was to play music. I didn't have the faith in Jesus that I needed to see me through making a radical break with music scene, even if it meant financial loss for a while. The apparent issue of survival became the mechanism the Devil used to trap me once again.

At this time, I formed my own band called "Project Cain," a fitting name for my spiritual despondency. I was busy recording Duncan Mckay, the popular keyboard player of the famous band 10 CC, when I received a call to go to Port Elizabeth, a city located about 700 miles north of Cape Town. The contract called for me to perform there for three months. I was hired as a solo rock artist performing six nights a week at one of the top night spots in the city.

Port Elizabeth became the final turning point of my spiritual pilgrimage. I rented a house far out in the country near a beautiful, isolated beach. Since my performances were at night, I had time during the day to wander along the beach and reflect on all that had transpired in my life for the past few years. I believe that this is where God wanted me to be.

Much of my professional life was spent surrounded by admirers and rock musicians. But at last I found myself on an isolated beach where God brought me face to face with my sinful past. During those three months, I sensed the Holy Spirit speaking to me as never before. Many days were spent on that lonely beach, examining the innermost recesses of my confused mind.

At times, the hidden truths of my wounded soul were very hard to face. I would break down in shameful anguish and allow the tears of repentance to flow like rivers of crystal clear water to wash away the stains of my sins. Sometimes I could almost feel the presence of the chiding and consoling Spirit of God bringing spiritual healing to my life.

The door of acceptance stood wide open. Finally, I boldly walked through it and closed behind me the door to my sinful and dark past. Upon my return home, in June 1994, Sue and I made the decision that by God's grace there would be no turning back into the world of rock. I severed all my business relationships with the rock-music scene. On 15 January 1995, we were married and decided to dedicate our lives to a special ministry on behalf of those who seek deliverance from the hypnotic power of rock music.

Helping Others to Find Deliverance from Rock

Today, I see myself as a grateful, living witness to what God can do for those who are willing to allow Him to change their lives and tastes. The goal of our ministry is to help Christians of all faiths to gain victory over their addiction to rock music and to develop appreciation for good Christian music.

During the past few years, I have traveled across Africa, Europe, and North America conducting seminars on "Music and Worship" at churches, schools, universities, hospitals, and many more venues. Whole churches have reconsidered their stand on the use of religious rock after learning *all the facts* about its mental, physical, and spiritual effects.

It has been a most gratifying experience for me to see people who once were fans of my rock music leaving behind forever the discordant atmospheres of rock and committing their lives to the Lord.

My deepest concern is for those who believe that rock music can be rightly used to worship God, as long as the lyrics are religious or speak about Jesus. I have witnessed the fallacy of this assumption time and again in my life and music ministry. Rock

music, in whatever version, stimulates people physically rather than elevating them spiritually. I've seen the fruits of "Christian" rock in live concerts. They are essentially no different than those of secular rock. I have heard every possible justification for the use of this music in worshipping a holy God, but none of them is biblical.

Making Good Musical Choices

Experience has taught me that there is a danger in teaching people how to make good musical choices by providing them with a clear-cut classification of what I would consider appropriate listening music, both secular and religious. This does not mean that good musical choices are simply a matter of personal taste. Taste, whether stemming from a cultural or developed personal bias, must be subject to certain musical, psychological, physiological, and spiritual/biblical criteria.

In other words, just because I have developed a taste for heavy metal or listening non-stop to Mozart's requiem does not mean that these are good musical choices for me. Persons who have lost their taste for water because over the years they have conditioned themselves to enjoy whisky on the rocks are not in a position to argue that whisky is healthier than water.

We have all been desensitized through the popular media, and our ability to effectively discern between good and bad music (and a host of other things) has been seriously compromised. Thus, to make good musical choices, one is wise to ask five probative questions:

1. Does the music really have something worthwhile to say? Are real moral truths communicated lyrically and instrumentally in the message of the music? Or is the music bland, repetitious, or coarse?

2. What is the intention behind the music? Is it sending out a positive or negative message? When you listen to the music, do you find that it conforms to the criteria spelled out by Paul in Philippians 4:8 about thinking and listening to whatsoever is pure, lovely, gracious, and worthy of praise? Does the music elevate you spiritually or stimulate you physically? Answering these questions requires honesty and practiced listening.

3. Is the intention of the music being communicated effectively? In other words, is the musician as a communicator good at what he does? Does he generate an atmosphere of reverence or frivolity?

4. Are the musical instruments used suitable for communicating the intention of the music? For example, if the music calls for flowing, extended, melodious notes, are the instruments being used those that can produce only short, percussive tones?

5. Are we seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit in our choice of both secular and religious music? We must remember that spiritual things can only be discerned spiritually. This means that we need the Holy Spirit to guide us in our choice of music. This is especially true today when we have been exposed to so much information, musical and otherwise, that has desensitized us.

We cannot rely solely on our judgment or taste when it comes to making good musical choices. We must allow the Holy Spirit to enlighten us on whether the music we are listening to has a spiritually uplifting effect, or is making a rebellious, depressive impact.

We need to be aware that it is not only heavy, beat-oriented music that can have a negative effect on us. Some other types of music with no beat whatsoever can dump us into the depths of depression. Some of these styles of music can be found in the classics, though they are usually recommended as alternative to modern pop and rock.

It is imperative to let the Holy Spirit guide us in rightly interpreting whether the *atmosphere* of a song is positive or negative. This does not mean that we put aside those guidelines that identify the objectionable aspects of rock music. What it means is that we will exercise our good judgment in tune with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This process may very well lead us to discard a whole genre of music.

How to Make Radical Decisions Regarding Music

When faced with the challenge of making radical decisions regarding our music, a person may ask: "What then is there left to listen to if all the rock music I like has to go out the window?" Don't let this attitude get in the way. The devil would love to have us believe that rock is the only music worth listening to. The practical way of approaching the issue is first to look at the present situation from a different perspective, and then to consider our future course in a more positive light. Let me share five suggestions that can help you make radical decisions regarding music.

1. Decide to become an individual by making up your own mind regarding good music on the basis of real information and not from peer pressure or personal taste. You won't have to sacrifice your personal taste or special preferences. They will simply have to become sanctified and refined. You won't need to go back into the nineteenth century or the dark ages to please God and live a life that respects the body temple.

It is simply a matter of getting rid of bad music while retaining good music. In this process, though you may get labeled as square or fanatic, it will show that you had the courage to stand for what you believe to be right and not follow the crowd. Indeed, you will then truly have become unique.

No one likes to be considered a sheep or zombie that follows the crowd without any individuality, yet this is the case with most people. It was true in my case. Nearly everything I did, as far as music, fashion, language, and attitude were concerned, was the direct result of pressure coming from popular trends. I was not an individual in the real sense of the word. I started to like rock because it was the "in" music to listen to. I wore what I did because fashion dictated that it was a "cool" way to look. In fact, *part of the reason why "Christian" Rock exists is that Christians are too scared to be different from the world.*

2. Consider your new musical choices to be an adventure, a process of discovery. Take time to define and refine your taste, to search out the musical gems in the pit of musical rot. Suddenly, you will discover that what you considered the only option in music was but a small fraction of the good music available. It may take some searching and prayerful listening, but in the end it will be worth it all.

3. Consider the five principles given above for making good musical choices and put them into practice when you listen to music. Search out and retain that which conforms to these basic rules. In that framework you will have room to exercise your own taste in music. Bear in mind that after years of exposure to negative types of music, your taste may have been perverted. Ask the Lord to help you recognize where your taste is defective. Once you feel sure that this has been revealed, do not hesitate to take the necessary step forward.

4. Listen carefully to lyrics to determine whether or not they are theologically sound. This is a very important exercise for it would be contradictory to have a lovely melody with lyrics that are totally unbiblical and insinuate an erroneous message. Ellen White correctly points out that "a song is one of the most effective means of impressing *spiritual truth* upon the heart," and can be effectively used to "proclaim the gospel message for this time."⁹

This means that the message of a song—words and atmosphere—must be tested by the teaching of Scripture. After all, a song can preach a sermon. It would be downright shameful if we allowed singing evangelists to get away with unsound doctrines in their lyrics, all in the name of freedom of expression and artistic license. Evangelism provides an ideal opportunity to combine the choosing of music with serious Bible study. What a great combination!

5. Choose songs with lyrics that concentrate on pure and ennobling aspects of life. Although a distinction remains between the music we use for worship and that for personal relaxation, the underlying principle of choosing that which is pure and ennobling remains the same. Consider Paul's admonition when making musical choices: "Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things" (Phil 4:8).

CONCLUSION

My spiritual pilgrimage from rock music to the Rock of Ages gives me reason to believe that many sincere people are seeking for divine deliverance from the addiction of rock music. The good news is that the God who delivered me from the bondage of rock music is able to liberate anyone who turns to Him for help.

The many years I spent as a performer, first of secular rock and then of "Christian" rock, have fully convinced me that, in whatever version, rock music embodies a spirit of rebellion against God and the moral principles He has revealed. The defining characteristic of the various forms of rock music is and remains the driving, pulsating beat which can alter the human mind and stimulate the physical, sensual aspect of human nature.

Our challenge today is to follow the example of the three Hebrew worthies on the plain of Dura. They refused to bow down before the golden image at the sound of Babylonian music. May God grant us wisdom and courage to reject the music of Babylon and to worship with music that honors Him and ennobles our character.

ENDNOTES

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