

Measuring the Music (Part 1)

The History of Rock and Roll

Text: Ephesians 5:18-19

Introduction:

1. Foundational principles on the music issue.
 - God is the Creator of Music and as with the rest of His creation, He has ordained laws for music – Job 38:7 “When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?” Our job is to seek to discover what those laws are within the Word of God and the structure of music itself. Fallen man, as with other good things God created, have taken God’s gift of music and perverted it to express the depravity of his unregenerate heart.
 - God’s Word is NOT silent or neutral on the music issue. According to the book *Measuring the Music*, “there are more than five hundred references to music in the Bible.” Apart from the many verses that address music specifically, there are a multitude of other truths in God’s Word that also have a bearing on this issue. We believe in the total sufficiency of the Scriptures for **every** aspect of the Christian life (2 Tim. 3:16-17).
 - Music is a language; it is not neutral. The music contains a message, even without words. In fact, the message of the music tends to impact before the lyrics.
 - Satan was created with musical abilities so we shouldn’t be surprised that now as a fallen creature he is at work in this area – Ezekiel 28:13 “Thou hast been in Eden the garden of God; every precious stone was thy covering, the sardius, topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald, and the carbuncle, and gold: **the workmanship of thy tabrets and of thy pipes was prepared in thee in the day that thou wast created.**”
2. As a part of our examination of the CCM issue, we need to go back and study the roots and history of the rock and roll movement.
3. This history of rock and roll is one long sordid story of revolution, moral breakdown, perversion, immorality, anarchy, rebellion, drugs, alcohol, violence, suicide and the occult. How the Christian church at large has embraced rock and roll as a medium of worship is unthinkable and yet here we are in the 21st century with a majority of professing churches rocking along to the same soundtrack.
4. Concerning the history of rock and roll, David Cloud notes, “In brief, rock and roll music is an amalgamation of sensual dance rhythms in celebration of sexual license and the loosing of authoritative moral restraint. Every rock song, by its very rhythm, with varying degrees of intensity, is saying, “Let the flesh have its way; do what you want to do.” A popular rock song by the Rolling Stones says, “I am free to do what I want any old time.” That summarizes the message of rock, but it is a lie because God says we were not created to do as we please.”¹

¹ D. Cloud, *Rock and Roll’s War Against God*, P. 49.

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5. In this lesson and the next we will seek to examine a historical sketch of rock and roll. For the sober minded, Bible believing Christian, it should be abundantly clear from the history of rock and roll alone why this sort of music should have NO part in our lives and in our churches.

I. ROCK AND ROLL: ITS ANCIENT ROOTS

A. Rock Music and Ancient Fertility Cults

1. Cloud: "The deeper roots of rock and roll stretch into pagan trance cults such as African voodoo and shamanism and old European goddess religions, such as the Corybantes, the cult of Cybele, and the Dinyasian cults. This is not the opinion merely of a fundamental Baptist preacher; it is documented by secular rock historians."
2. Mickey Hart, drummer for the band Grateful Dead, has done extensive research into the history of the rock beat and documented his research in a book entitled *Drumming at the Edge of Magic*. Mickey Hart is best known as one of the two drummers of the rock band **Grateful Dead**. He was a member of the **Grateful Dead** from September 1967 until February 1971, and again from October 1974 until their final show in July 1995. On his official website in the bio section it states, "Mickey Hart is best known as a drummer in the Grateful Dead, which for three decades channelled the voices and visions of rock's psychedelic counterculture and blended them with folk, blues, country, jazz, and other American music streams. On the strength of that work, Hart was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and named to Rolling Stone's 100 Greatest Drummers of All Time."² Consider the following quotes from Hart's book about the roots of rock and roll:
 - a. He concluded that rock and roll is "the latest extension of the African backbeat" (*Drumming at the Edge of Magic*, p. 64).³
 - b. "According to archaeologist Marija Gimbutas, author of *The Language of the Goddess* and one of the major scholars attempting to reconstruct the consciousness of Neolithic Old Europe, there was 'an intimate relationship between the drum and the goddess'...With the adoption of Christianity by the Roman Empire, wrote Blades, percussive music was banned as 'mischievous' and 'licentious'; the drums and cymbals were particularly singled out as evidence of 'the devil's pomposity'" (Hart, *Drumming at the Edge of Magic*, p. 73, 77).⁴
 - c. "Shamans are drummers – they're rhythmists, they're trance masters who have understood something fundamental about the nature of the drum, something I badly wanted to learn. I noticed, as I began to study the anthropological debate over percussion and transition, that most of the examples of percussive trance fell into two broad categories. In the first, drumming was used to summon the spirits or the gods down into the body of someone other than the drummer, usually a dancer. This is known as

² <https://www.mickeyhart.net/bio> Viewed 16.6.21

³ Cited by Cloud, *Rock and Rolls War Against God*, P. 52

⁴ Ibid, pp. 52-53.

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possession trance. The classic example is vodun, where the spirits – called the loa – are said to descend and mount the bodies of the dancers and ride them like horses. The second type of trance is shamanic or ‘communion trance’...In a communion trance the spirit or soul of the drummer is said to ride his drumbeat like a horse up to the spirit world, where he (and it is usually a male) transacts his business in an active rather than a passive way...shamans are people who have developed techniques that allow them to enter esoteric states of consciousness. The shaman’s drum is the Skeleton Key to the Other Worlds...There have been many times when I’ve felt as if the drum has carried me to an open door into another world” (Hart, pp. 163, 175, 176).⁵

- d. “...when the slave ships began plying the waters between the New World and West Africa, everyone thought they carried just strong, expendable bodies. But they were also carrying the Counterplayer culture – MAYBE EVEN THE MOTHER GODDESS CULTURE – PRESERVED IN THE FORM OF DRUM RHYTHMS THAT COULD CALL DOWN THE ORISHA⁶ FROM THEIR TIME TO OURS. In the Caribbean and South America, slaves were allowed to keep their drums and thus preserved their vital connection with the Orisha, though the sudden mingling of so many different tribes produced new variations like candomblé, santería, and vodun...AND OUT OF THIS SEVERING CAME JAZZ, THE BLUES, THE BACKBEAT, RHYTHM AND BLUES, AND ROCK AND ROLL – SOME OF THE MOST POWERFUL RHYTHMS ON THE PLANET.” (Hart, pp. 209, 210).⁷
- e. “It is hard to pinpoint the exact moment when I awoke to the fact that my tradition – rock and roll – did have a spirit side, that there was a branch of the family that had maintained the ancient connection between the drum and the gods.” (Hart, p. 212).⁸

B. Rock Music and Voodoo

CCM defenders try and deny the connection between voodoo, African witchcraft and rock music and yet this connection is plainly documented by research.

1. Leonard Seidel, a concert pianist and distinguished lecturer on music, has researched this topic and exposes the lie that there is not connection between voodoo and African paganism and rock music: “The incessant, poly-rhythms pounded out on cylindrical drums (by African tribals) is the catalyst of rhythm and blues, rock and roll, and

⁵ Ibid, p. 53.

⁶ ‘Orisha’ refers to “any of the deities of the Yoruba people of southwestern Nigeria. They are also venerated by the Edo of south-eastern Nigeria; the Ewe of Ghana, Benin, and Togo; and the Fon of Benin (who refer to them as voduns). Although there is much variation in the details of the rituals and mythology of these deities among these West African peoples, the underlying religious concept is essentially the same.” Brandon, George. “Orisha”. Encyclopedia Britannica, 4 May. 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/orisha>. Accessed 16 June 2021.

⁷ Cited by Cloud, p. 54.

⁸ Ibid

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today's heavy metal. It is amazing that the reactions we see at a contemporary rock concert are an exact copy of what happened in the Pinkster celebrations (black festivals in New York) or at Place Congo (black slave dancing in New Orleans) during the Antebellum Period. Any analysis that denies this fact renders the church impoverished in its understanding of the African connection in the rock movement of the 20th century."⁹

2. Davin Seay in his book *Stairway to Heaven*, quotes Robert Palmer in *Rolling Stone Illustrated History of Rock 'N' Roll*, "In a very real sense rock was implicit in the music of the first Africans brought to North America. And implicit in their music were centuries of accumulated rites, rituals, and religious fervor. The music of those first brutalized and bewildered slaves, ripped from cultures as old as the Pyramids, those ancient chants and tribal stomps, didn't simply evoke the spirits of the forest gods; they animated and immortalized them." (Davin Seay, *Stairway to Heaven*, New York: Ballantine Books, 1986, p. 11).¹⁰
3. One of the most significant books ever published on this subject is the study done by Maya Deren under the Guggenheim Foundation in 1953 concerning the history of the African tribal origins of demon gods and voodoo meetings in Haiti. The book *Divine Horseman—The Living Gods of Haiti*, deals with the importation of the slaves from the West coast of Africa to the Caribbean Islands. She states: "Their religious worship was based on drums and dancing, and as they worshipped a god or demon, the ultimate experience was to have their bodies possessed by that demon. The rituals were grossly sensualistic and sadistic."¹¹
4. Cloud: "She observes that the dancers are forced to salute the drummers first before any other part of the ritual is entered into. It is obvious that without the drum, the ritual cannot progress. What a striking parallel to the modern rock band! The drum set is always centre stage, usually elevated behind the lead singer. Without the drummer (or in many cases the bass guitarist), the rock band would cease to exist."
5. Illustration: West African Drummer Rocki's (wasi Dzidzornu) testimony of Jimi Hendrix's music. The following is an excerpt from Hendrix's biography: "He (Hendrix) ha gotten a chance to see Rocki and some other African musicians on the London scene. He found it a pleasure to play rhythms against their polyrhythms...Rocki's father was a voodoo priest and the chief drummer of a village in Ghana, West Africa. One of the first things Rocki asked Jimi was where he got that voodoo rhythm from. When Jimi demurred, Rocki went on to explain in his halting English that many of the signature rhythms Jimi played on guitar were very often the same rhythms that his father played in voodoo ceremonies. The way Jimi danced to the rhythms of his playing

⁹ Ibid, p. 394.

¹⁰ Ibid, pp. 394-395.

¹¹ Cloud, p. 395.

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reminded Rocki of the ceremonial dances to the rhythms his father played to Oxun, the god of thunder and lightning.”¹²

6. Video segments from Emmanuel Otutei (Ghana, West Africa).

II. ROCK AND ROLL: ITS MODERN ROOTS

We can trace several streams of influence that led to the modern rock and roll era:

A. Rocks Roots in Blues Music

1. The Oxford Dictionary plainly states that blues music gave rise to rock and roll. Blues is, “Melancholic music of black American folk origin, typically in a twelve-bar sequence. It developed in the rural southern US toward the end of the 19th century, finding a wider audience in the 1940s, as black people migrated to the cities. **This urban blues gave rise to rhythm and blues and rock and roll.**”¹³
2. Regarding the influence of the blues, Encyclopedia Britannica notes, “The blues have influenced many other musical styles. Blues and jazz are closely related; such seminal jazzmen as Jelly Roll Morton and Louis Armstrong employed blues elements in their music. Soul music and rhythm and blues also show obvious blues tonalities and forms. **The blues have had their greatest influence on rock music.** Early rock singers such as Elvis Presley often used blues material. British rock musicians in the 1960s, especially the Rolling Stones, Eric Clapton, and John Mayall, were strongly influenced by the blues, as were such American rock musicians as Mike Bloomfield, Paul Butterfield, and the Allman Brothers Band.”¹⁴
3. “The term “rock and roll” was a slang expression for fornication in the sleazy juke joints and honky tonks where blues was performed.”¹⁵
4. The term was popular amongst blacks long before it gained popularity with white audiences in the 50s as the following titles of blues and boogie-woogie songs illustrates:
 - a. “My Man Rocks Me (with One Steady Roll)” by Trixie Smith, 1922
 - b. “Rock Me Mama” by Ikey Robinson, 1929
 - c. “Rocking and Rolling” by Bob Robinson, 1930
 - d. “Rockin’ in Rhythm” by Duke Ellington, 1931
 - e. “Rock and Roll” by the Boswell Sisters, 1934
 - f. “Rock Me Daddy” by Georgia White, 1937
 - g. “Rock It for Me” by Mildred Bailey, 1938
 - h. “Rocking the Blues” by Port of Harlem Jazzmen, 1939
 - i. “Keep Rockin’” by Harlan Leonard, 1940
 - j. “I Want to Rock” by Cab Calloway, 1942
 - k. “Royal Rockin’ Rhythm” by Nat King Cole, 1944

¹² Cloud, pp. 399-400.

¹³ <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/blues> Viewed 17/6/21.

¹⁴ Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Blues". Encyclopedia Britannica, 6 May. 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/art/blues-music>. Accessed 17 June 2021.

¹⁵ Cloud, p. 55.

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- l. “Rockin’ the Boogie” by Hadda Brooks, 1945
 - m. “Good Rockin’ Tonight” by Roy Brown, 1947
 - n. “Shout and Rock” by Billy Williams, 1948
 - o. “Rock and Roll” by the Flairs, 1949
 - p. “Rock the Joint” by Jimmy Preston, 1949
 - q. “We’re Gonna Rock” by Cecil Gant, 1950
 - r. “Rock ‘n’ Roll” by John Lee Hooker (1950)
 - s. “Rockin’ and Rollin’” by Lil Son Jackson (1950)
 - t. “All I Do Is Rock” by the Robins, 1951
 - u. “Rock Me All Night Long” by the Ravens, 1952
 - v. “Rock, Rock, Rock” by Amos Milburn, 1953
5. There were two inventions that helped spread and popularize blues music in the 40s and 50s – radio and jukeboxes.
- a. The Jukebox
 - i. A jukebox is a partially automated music-playing device, usually a coin-operated machine, that will play a patron's selection from self-contained media. The classic jukebox has buttons, with letters and numbers on them, which are used to select a specific record.
 - ii. The word ‘jukebox’ came into use in the United States beginning in 1940, apparently derived from the familiar usage “juke joint” derived from the Gullah word “juke” or “joog” meaning disorderly rowdy or wicked.¹⁶
 - iii. Jukeboxes were most popular from the 1940s through the mid-1960s, particularly during the 1950s. By the middle of the 1940s, three-quarters of the records produced in America went into jukeboxes.¹⁷
 - b. The Radio
 - i. Portable radio became available in the 1950s and aided the spread of blues music.
 - ii. One author observes, “By the time Elvis Presley had checked into the Heartbreak Hotel, in the early fifties, radio had already become tremendously important as a conveyor of rock and roll’s message. Suddenly, 17 million teenagers were virtually putty in the hands of the country’s 1,700 deejays. Albert Goldman, Presley’s biographer, noted: ‘As these kids got up in the morning, or came home from school, as they rode in cars or lay on the beach with their portables, as they did their homework in the evening or snuggled in their beds at night with the lights out and their minds open in the most suggestible condition, **the DJs enjoyed an incomparable opportunity to mold the imagination of an entire generation**’” (Dan and Steve Peters, *Why Knock Rock?* p. 34).¹⁸

¹⁶ Wikipedia.org, Viewed 17.6.21.

¹⁷ Cowen, Tyler (2000). *In Praise of Commercial Culture*. Harvard University Press. pp. 164, 166. ISBN 0-674-00188-5. Viewed on wikipedia.org 17/6/21.

¹⁸ Cited by Cloud, pp. 56-57.

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- iii. Another author states, “In this new subculture of rock and roll **THE IMPORTANT FIGURES OF AUTHORITY WERE NO LONGER MAYORS AND SELECTMEN OR PARENTS; THEY WERE DISC JOCKEYS, WHO REAFFIRMED THE RIGHT TO YOUTHFUL INDEPENDENCE AND GUIDED TEENAGERS TO THEIR NEW ROCK HEROES.** The young formed their own community. For the first time in American life, they were becoming a separate, defined part of the culture. As they had money, they were a market, and as they were a market they were listened to and catered to. Elvis was the first beneficiary. **In effect, he was entering millions of American homes on the sly;** if the parents had had their way, he would most assuredly have been barred” (*The Fifties*, David Halberstam p. 474).¹⁹
6. Blues Music was the music of immorality.
 - a. David Cloud writes, “What many histories about rock and roll do not plainly state is that the blues, speaking generally, represented the ungodly side, the “red light district” of black music and culture...Pious blacks who took Jesus Christ and the Bible seriously and who were faithful to biblical churches, condemned immorality and drunkenness and violence as well as the blues and boogie-woogie music that was associated with those things.”
 - b. It was the music of the houses of prostitution. “Like the whorehouses in New Orleans and St. Louis, the Gayoso houses provided employment for Memphis’s early ragtime pianists...The Gayoso brothels gave many white Memphians their first dose of syncopation and the blues. Compared to the pallid ballads and sentimental ‘heart songs’ that the Victorian era offered, that ‘whorehouse music’ would have been exciting in any situation. Given the extra tang of forbidden fruit, of social and moral taboos being broken all around, those **sexually syncopated sounds proved irresistible.**” (emphasis added) (Larry Nager, *Memphis Beat*, p. 26).²⁰
 - c. There were a variety of subjects in blues songs but “above all other subjects there is in blues a preponderance of lyrics about sexual love, or merely sex. A complex language of metaphors often domestic or culinary, camouflaged a multitude of sexual references.” (Oliver, *The Story of the Blues*, p. 116) Recording talent scout Henry C. Speir described the music as “pornography”.²¹
7. Blues Music was rejected by godly blacks of the time
 - a. Gayle Dean Wardlow is a blues scholar who researched the artists on old 78 RPM records to uncover their stories and wrote a book entitled *Chasin’ That Devil Music*. She plainly states, “If

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 125.

²⁰ Ibid, p. 69.

²¹ Cloud, p. 99.

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you played blues, you played where people drank and gambled and carried on and committed adultery – all the things that the black church and the white church stood against: gambling, fornication, adultery, violence, murder.” (p. 144)²²

- b. Another author notes, “S-- was inextricably linked with the blues and jazz. It was not a prejudice: it was a fact of life...In truth, black parents were often disapproving of blues and jazz music, and often pulled out the broomstick when their daughters showed an interest in the ‘devil’s music’” (Dickerson, *Goin’ Back to Memphis*, pp. 29, 30).²³
- c. William Christopher Handy (W.C. Handy) (Nov. 16th, 1873 – March 28, 1958) was a blues musician who so contributed to the rise of blues as a popular genre that he has been called “the father of the blues.” He was from a Christian home and both his grandfather and his father were preachers. In his autobiography entitled, “Father of the Blues” he recounts how that when he brought a guitar home in his early teen years his parents were shocked and his father said: “A guitar! One of the devil’s playthings. Take it away. Get it out of your hands. Whatever possessed you to bring a sinful thing like that into our Christian home?”²⁴ (*Father of the Blues*, p. 10)

To be continued...

Conclusion:

1. We are called in the Word of God to a life of separation from the world and its evil. The history of rock and roll alone should be enough to convince the blood-washed, born again believer that it should have no place in his life. See Eph. 5:11; Rom. 12:1-2; 1 John 2:15-17; James 1:27; 2 Cor. 6:14-18; James 4:4; 1 Peter 1:15-16.
2. Will you surrender your music to the Lordship of Christ?

²² Ibid, p. 66

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Ibid, p. 67.