

THE UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE

An exploration of the evolution of music

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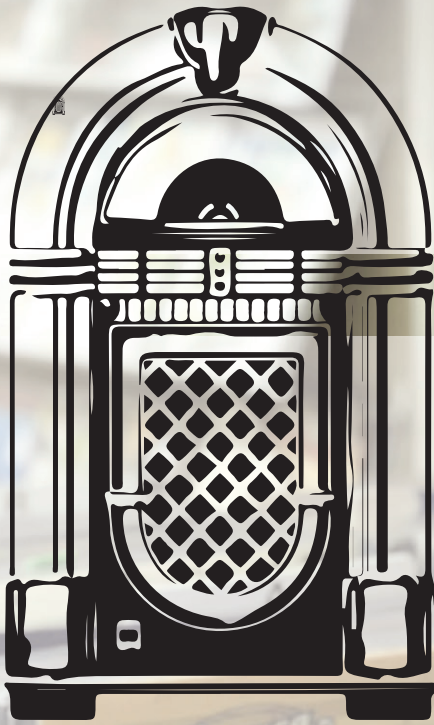
So it begins...

In the hallways, in class, on the bus, in their cars, teenagers seem to constantly be pumping music into their ears. Walk down the hallways of any school in America and at least half of the students walking through the hallway will have earbuds in. Music has had its hold on teens for generations. For any age group, put on popular music from when they were growing up and they'll be sure to sing along.

Music has changed monumentally since the days of Chuck Berry and Frank Sinatra, but three factors remain the same: society drives music, music inspires the current generation, and the current generation drives change.

Fabulous 50's

The fifties were a pivotal decade for change in music, not because it was particularly politically charged, but because it was a turning point in the twentieth century. Much of what occurred in the sixties was a reaction to the fifties. Probably the most well known artist of the fifties was Elvis. Though his music was not exactly political in nature, it definitely caused a social change. However, it was less the music and more the man who caused the outcry. His dance moves, moving his hips (which to us seems like the last dance move to worry about) were particularly controversial. This combined with his popularity helped start the outcry against normalcy, conservativeness, and traditional roles after World War II.



Swinging 60's

The sixties were a whole different deal. The decade is known for many different political and social events. The most common of these events in music are the civil rights movement and anti-war songs. Vietnam claimed the lives of many and the attention of the entire country. Response in music was almost inevitable. Countless artists wrote songs about the war: Bob Dylan, Crosby Stills Nash and Young, Joan Baez.

The songs of the sixties added to the palpable tension of the time. Songs such as "Fortunate Son" by Creedence Clearwater Revival describe the reality that if you were lucky enough to be born into privilege then you had a chance to get out of the war. Bob Dylan's "Only a Pawn in Their Game" and Nina Simone's "Mississippi Goddamn" both show the horrid effects of racism in the United States. "Respect" by Aretha Franklin was written in a time when women were fighting tooth and nail to be considered equal to men and to gain equal rights.

Superb 70's

The seventies dealt with much of the same issues as the sixties did. Racism and the Vietnam war were the two of the most prominent topics well into the seventies. In a word, turmoil. Marvin Gaye's "What's Going On" demonstrates both the political and social situation in the US. "Ohio" by Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young describes outrage at the four students killed at the Kent State protests. Though the material was much the same, still full of anger and still preaching peace, the sound morphed from folk to a much different, funkier, classic rock sound.

Exciting 80's

Big hair, big cars, and big fashion statements defined the trends in the eighties. Along with these trends came artists like Michael Jackson, Prince, and Bon Jovi, who had a major impact on fashion in this time period. Jackson's unique style, specifically his leather jackets, sparked fashion trends that we still see today. Jackson sold over 750 million albums during his lifetime. His best selling album, *Thriller*, sold over 66 million copies, and sat at number 1 on the Billboard 200 charts for nine months. *Thriller* also changed the game for a lot of recording artists by making its music video as famous as the song itself.



Nirvana 90's

Although fashion from the nineties is heavily imitated today, the type of music people listen to has changed. In the nineties, hip hop and R&B took a turn in the spotlight. Recording artists like Nirvana, Spice Girls, and Backstreet Boys claimed the top of the charts. Music festivals such as Lollapalooza and Coachella were founded during this time, where popular recording artists perform in front of thousands of people. These festivals continue to thrive today.



Early 2000's

The early 2000s bring back bittersweet memories of blaring songs by Kelly Clarkson, Britney Spears, and Lady Gaga on an MP3 player. Remixes became extremely popular during this time. Electronic dance music (EDM), such as trap music and dubstep, also started to gain popularity. This was not a time of social or political commentary, but rather one of love songs and boy bands. People began to make music for the sound rather than for the words. And yet at the same time, fewer and fewer artists used instruments, instead opting for artificial, techno sounds to make up their music.

...And it goes on and on and on and on

It seems our generation has come full circle. Artists are getting increasingly more political and willing to talk about controversial topics. Khalid, XXXTentacion, and Post Malone have all been outspoken against racism and the current political state of the nation. They've tried to unite our generation, helping many to amplify their own voices and opinions. So though the changes in the structure and material of music have been drastic, the unifying and expressive factor hasn't changed.