

Luis Zanforlin
America from the Jazz Age to the MTV Age
Dec/80/2017
2081 Words

60's APOLOGISTS AND 70's PERSECUTORS

Study of Drug Culture in American
Music of the 60's and 70's

Throughout American history, drug consumption was reflected in the arts from the prohibition era until today. However the decade in which drugs were the most prominent in American arts was in the 1960's. During this wave, musicians, painters, writers, and photographers publicly endorsed and consumed drugs on an unprecedented scale, which was even more shocking when compared to the strict condemnation of drugs of 1950's culture. With the new found adoration for tranquilizers and hallucinogenics by the 60's youth, this culture of drug endorsement would last throughout the entire decade but take a turn in the 70's. In the new political environment of the 70s, the reaction to stronger drugs and the delayed side effects of the 60's drug abuse started to permeate American culture, prompting artists from all over the country to become more hostile to drugs.

From 50's Conformity to 60's Liberalism

To understand how America's 60's generation became the prominent drug endorsing decade, it's necessary to look at the cultural norms of the 50's. Thanks to the divide between capitalism and communism in American culture, many politicians looked at left leaning ideals with a new born hostility, leading to a series of campaigns which aimed to prevent the population from adopting the socialist ideology. This strategy lead to president Truman's "Loyalty Program," which launched investigations against federal employees in search of communists "plotting" against the United States. The investigations, however, grew more conservative, effectively becoming a legal way for the government to eradicate liberal values, such as drug use and homosexuality, by associating those values with socialism. According to an account in the book *The Sixties*, "The State Department boasted that it was firing one homosexual per day, eventually almost 600 from the federal workforce." (Anderson, P.5) With the fear of governmental persecution and communism proliferation resulting from the cold war, American culture turned away from liberal thinking and grew ever more conforming. "Americans moved into the suburbs filled with similar homes, similar people who had similar ideas." (Anderson P.6) The enforced conformity of the 50's saw drugs as a threat for altering the state of mind to an uncontrollable non-conforming and free spirit personality.

Drugs as Relief

In *Mother's Little Helper* (1966) by the Rolling Stones, the lyrics tells the story of a stay at home housewife much like the female ideal of 50's suburbia. However as the song suggests, "things are different today" inferring that in the 60's, the housewife's role is no longer looked upon with glory and glee but from the sad perspective of the mother who needs something "to calm her down." The idea of "cooking fresh food for a husband's just a drag" and even her own happiness is no longer a persuable dream. The solution to the 50's housewife in the new decade is to resort to tranquilizing drugs as suggested by the lyrics "running for the shelter of a mother's little helper." These drugs, previously judged to be dangerous to American society, are now casually seen as a way to "tranquilize your mind" by an unprecedented number of young people. According to an account on the book *The Sixties*, during the Summer of Love young people were publicly "smoking and selling marijuana... dropping LSD or, as they joked, participating in the Trips Festival and taking Acid Tests." (Anderson P,86)

Another song which references drug use as a method of relaxation and a way to tolerate the normal life is *The Crystal Ship* (1967) by *The Doors*. In this song, Jim Morrison, who was known to be an alcohol dependent and would later die at a young age, sings, "Before you slip into unconsciousness I'd like to have another kiss; Another flashing chance at bliss." The song suggests the benefits of using drugs by contrasting it with the unpleasant nature of sober life with the lines, "The days are bright and filled with pain" and, "Deliver me from reasons why; You'd rather cry, I'd rather fly."

Another hit song in from the 60's which is now famously associated with drug endorsement is *Good Vibrations* (1966) by the Beach Boys. The lyrics from this revolutionary song makes reference to drugs by pairing the smell of marijuana with the line, "On the wind that lifts her perfume through the air," referencing hallucinogenics with the line, "Close my eyes, she's somehow closer now" and, "She goes with me to a blossom world." The sound of the song mirrors an hallucinogenic drug trip by constantly jumping the soundscape from ordinary pop instruments to a cacophony of odd sounds and textures. The increasingly abstract nature of the lyrics, which go from a lyrical chorus to the use of small phonemes, such as "Na na na Do do do," can be reflected as the experience of getting high and lousing touch with reality.

60's Drug Philosophy

During the second half of the 60's many social labels were created to identify people with specific philosophies and activist groups such as hippies, yipees, freaks and others. A common ideal among many of these groups was that in order to free the world from oppressive values it is necessary to free the mind, something which could be obtained with the use of drugs. Some groups even specified what kinds of drugs helped achieve the goal of opening the mind to a new perspective without causing personal harm, as explained by the account of a hippie, "DOPE, not DRUGS- alcohol is a DRUG, pot is DOPE; nicotine is a DRUG acid is DOPE; DRUGS turn you off... DOPE turns you on." (Anderson P. 123)

The song *White Rabbit* (1967) by the band Jefferson Airplane explores the distinct effects of different drugs by making an analogy to Lewis Carroll's novel *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* with the line, "One pill makes you larger, and one pill makes you small." The song's lyrics also criticize the drugs taken by the previous generation (tobacco and alcohol) with the line, "the ones that mother gives you, don't do anything at all." The cultural perspective on these drugs was that they were ineffective in achieving the goal of altering the mind into a new state of consciousness, that state is alluded to in the end of the song as Grace Wing Slick sings, "Remember what the dormouse said, Feed your head, feed your head."

From 60's dream to 70's Conservatism

By the end of the decade, the activist culture of young Americans started to lose its political focus. With popular events such as Woodstock and the Summer of Love gathering large crowds, what was once considered counter culture became the norm. This shift created a disassociation between liberal values and political activism. The American population started to view hippie culture as a form of self interest, as noted in the documentary movie *The Century: America's Time*, "We didn't care about who was elected president... our interest in politics waned incredibly starting in the early 70's." With a large portion of liberal Americans losing interest in politics came the surprisingly conservative election of President Nixon, who would change Americans' perspective on drugs into an enemy.

Coinciding with Nixon's election was a sequence of unfortunate events, such as the unofficial loss of the Vietnam war, the Watergate scandal and mass unemployment caused by the oil embargo, which stopped the American economy. These events resulted in a downturn of the country's morale causing many Americans to "pursu[e] separate individual paths to happiness and in the process they lost a clear sense of national purpose." (*The Century: America's Time 1971-1975: Approaching the Apocalypse*)

70's Drugs

With the conservative look on drugs dominating the media, the legal solution for many Americans came from pharmaceutical companies which, "bombarded the media with ads for medicines or mood enhancers from *Effexor* to *Prozac* to *Zoloft*." (Anderson, P. 192) While these "medicines" supplied the needs of a large part of the population, the illegal drug market started to shift from marijuana and LSD to the increasingly popular drugs cocaine and heroin. The new demand for harder addictive drugs resulted in many violent conflicts between dealers. Deaths by overdose also skyrocketed, changing the narrative of many artists from endorsement to condemnation of drugs.

The rock song, *That Smell* (1977) by the band Lynyrd Skynyrd, directly addresses their condemnation of cocaine and heroine with the lines, "There's too much coke and too much smoke; Look what's going on inside you" and "Go on stick those needles in your arm, You're just a fool, just a fool, just a fool." The song also comments on the problematic use of legal drugs with the lyrics "Whiskey bottles, and brand new cars;

Oak tree you're in my way" which includes alcohol among the condemned drugs. With the lines, "The smell of death surrounds you" and, "Just one more fix, Lord might do the trick; One hell of a price for you to get your kicks," the song also comments on the many deaths caused by overdose by directly addressing the listener as an outcome of drug use, thus serving as a cautionary tale for the younger generation.

70's Loses and Break-ups

One of the causes for the depressive demeanor of 70's culture may be attributed to the delayed side effects to overwhelming environments of the 60's. After enough time, the effects of the drug use and a reckless lifestyle began to seep into the spotlight. The public became aware of famous overdose death cases such as Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, Jim Morrison and many more. This fallout time also became responsible for many band members to break up with their groups due to reckless behavior, one in particular became the inspiration for an iconic psychedelic rock album, *Wish You Were Here* (1975) by the band Pink Floyd.

Pink Floyd's iconic album pays homage to the band's breakup with Syd Barrett who played guitar for the band until the late 60's when the player's LSD abuse resulted in their separation. The album's song *Shine On You Crazy Diamond* laments the effects that psychedelics had on their lost musician with the lines, "Remember when you were young, you shone like the sun; Now there's a look in your eyes, like black holes in the sky." In the line, "You were caught on the crossfire of childhood and stardom," the band speaks to Syd Barrett while mirroring the cultural lament of the innocent losses which came during the 60's most tumultuous years. The album's title track, *Wish You Were Here*, like the cultural perspective of the 70's, is much darker and depressive in nature compared to rock music of the 60's. The lines, "Did they get you to trade; Your heroes for ghosts" echo the youths' question of if the "mind opening" drugs that resulted in many great pieces of art were worth the loss of many great artists. In the beginning of the song, the band once more exposes the loss of consciousness resulted from drug abuse with the lines, "So, so you think you can tell heaven from hell; Blue skies from pain; Can you tell a green field from a cold steel rail?"

Another song which references bands break-ups due to drug abuse is *Needle And The Damage Done* (1972) by Neil Young. The song is sung from the perspective of a heroine user who moves to the city and loses everything with the lines, "I hit the city and I lost my band" and, "I watched the needle take another man." The song also comments on the role that Neil Young himself plays as a young musician while reminding the listener the inevitable fate heroine addicts face due to the drug's powerful dependency characteristics. He does so by singing, "A little part of it in everyone; But every junkie's like a settin' sun."

Conclusion:

American drug culture is reflected in popular music of the 60's as a beneficial method of opening the mind. By the 70's, the drug narrative shifts to a false dream which robbed the population from their heroes and hopes by destroying their consciousness and lives. This shift occurs due to the decay of the youths' dream of improving the world through self exploration, a change in the decade's mood due to events such as the defeat in Vietnam, Watergate, the oil embargo and the increase of cocaine and heroin overdose deaths resulting in the body of pro and anti drug songs which make place in American culture until today.

Citation:

Print:

Anderson, Terry H. *The Sixties*. 4th ed., Pearson, 2012.

Film:

The Century: America's Time 1971-1975: Approaching the Apocalypse. You Tube. 1999. Accessed December 10, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4cLv5FH0FA>.

Songs:

Mother's Little Helper (1966) Rolling Stones

What a drag it is getting old

"Kids are different today", I hear every mother say
Mother needs something today to calm her down
And though she's not really ill, there's a little yellow pill

She goes running for the shelter of her mother's little helper
And it helps her on her way, gets her through her busy day

"Things are different today", I hear every mother say
Cooking fresh food for a husband's just a drag
So she buys an instant cake and she buys a frozen steak

And goes running for the shelter of her mother's little helper
And to help her on her way, get her through her busy day

Doctor, please, some more of these
Outside the door, she took four more
What a drag it is getting old

"Men just aren't the same today", I hear every mother say
"They just don't appreciate that you get tired"
"They're so hard to satisfy", you can tranquilize your mind

So go running for the shelter of your mother's little helper
And four help you through the night, help to minimize your plight

Doctor, please, some more of these
Outside the door, she took four more
What a drag it is getting old

“Life’s just much too hard today”, I hear ev’ry mother say
The pursuit of happiness just seems a bore
And if you take more of those, you will get an overdose

No more running for the shelter of a mother’s little helper
They just helped you on your way through your busy dying day

The Crystal Ship (1967) The Doors

Before you slip into unconsciousness
I’d like to have another kiss
Another flashing chance at bliss
Another kiss, another kiss

The days are bright and filled with pain
Enclose me in your gentle rain
The time you ran was too insane
We’ll meet again, we’ll meet again

Oh tell me where your freedom lies
The streets are fields that never die
Deliver me from reasons why
You’d rather cry, I’d rather fly

The crystal ship is being filled
A thousand girls, a thousand thrills
A million ways to spend your time
When we get back, I’ll drop a line

Good Vibrations (1966) the Beach Boys

I-I love the colorful clothes she wears
And the way the sunlight plays upon her hair
I hear the sound of a gentle word
On the wind that lifts her perfume through the air

I’m pickin’ up good vibrations
She’s giving me excitations (Oom bop bop)
I’m pickin’ up good vibrations (Good vibrations, oom bop bop)
She’s giving me excitations (Excitations, oom bop bop)

Good, good, good, good vibrations (Oom bop bop)
She's giving me excitations (Excitations, oom bop bop)
Good, good, good, good vibrations (Oom bop bop)
She's giving me excitations (Excitations, oom bop bop)

Close my eyes, she's somehow closer now
Softly smile, I know she must be kind
When I look in her eyes
She goes with me to a blossom world

I'm pickin' up good vibrations
She's giving me excitations (Oom bop bop)
I'm pickin' up good vibrations (Good vibrations, oom bop bop)
She's giving me excitations (Excitations, oom bop bop)
Good, good, good, good vibrations (Oom bop bop)
She's giving me excitations (Excitations, oom bop bop)
Good, good, good, good vibrations (Oom bop bop)
She's giving me excitations (Excitations, oom bop bop)

(Ah, my my, what elation)
I don't know where but she sends me there
(Oh, my my, what a sensation)
(Oh, my my, what elation)
(Oh, my my, what)

Gotta keep those lovin' good vibrations a-happenin' with her
Gotta keep those lovin' good vibrations a-happenin' with her
Gotta keep those lovin' good vibrations a-happenin'

Good, good, good, good vibrations (Oom bop bop)
(I'm pickin' up good vibrations) (Oom bop bop)
She's giving me excitations (Excitations, oom bop bop)
Good, good, good, good vibrations

Na na na na na, na na na
Na na na na na, na na na (Bop bop-bop-bop-bop, bop)
Do do do do do, do do do (Bop bop-bop-bop-bop, bop)
Do do do do do, do do do (Bop bop-bop-bop-bop, bop)

White Rabbit (1967) Jefferson Airplane

One pill makes you larger
And one pill makes you small
And the ones that mother gives you
Don't do anything at all

Go ask Alice
When she's ten feet tall

And if you go chasing rabbits
And you know you're going to fall
Tell 'em a hookah smoking caterpillar
Has given you the call...
Call Alice
When she was just small

When the men on the chessboard
Get up and tell you where to go
And you've just had some kind of mushroom
And your mind is moving low
Go ask Alice
I think she'll know

When logic and proportion
Have fallen sloppy dead
And the White Knight is talking backwards
And the Red Queen's off with her head
Remember what the Dormouse said
Feed your head
Feed your head
Feed your head

That Smell (1977) Lynyrd Skynyrd

Whiskey bottles, and brand new cars
Oak tree you're in my way
There's too much coke and too much smoke
Look what's going on inside you
Ooooh that smell
Can't you smell that smell
Ooooh that smell
The smell of death surrounds you

Angel of darkness is upon you
Stuck a needle in your arm
So take another toke, have a blow for your nose
One more drink, fool, will drown you
Ooooh that smell
Can't you smell that smell
Ooooh that smell
The smell of death surrounds you

Now they call you Prince Charming
Can't speak a word when you're full of 'ludes
Say you'll be alright come tomorrow
But tomorrow might not be here for you (Yeah, you)

Ooh, that smell
Can't you smell that smell?
Ooh, that smell
The smell of death surrounds you

Shine On You Crazy Diamond (1975) Pink Floyd

Remember when you were young?
You shone like the sun
Shine on you crazy diamond!
Now there's a look in your eyes
Like black holes in the sky
Shine on you crazy diamond!

You were caught on the cross fire of childhood and stardom
Blown on the steel breeze
Come on, you target for faraway laughter
Come on, you stranger, you legend, you martyr, and shine!

You reached for the secret too soon
You cried for the moon
Shine on you crazy diamond!
Threatened by shadows at night
And exposed in the light
Shine on you crazy diamond!

Well you wore out your welcome with random precision
Rode on the steel breeze
Come on you raver, you seer of visions
Come on you painter, you piper, you prisoner, and shine!

Nobody knows where you are, how near or how far
Shine on you crazy diamond
Pile on many more layers and I'll be joining you there
Shine on you crazy diamond
And we'll bask in the shadow of yesterday's triumph, and sail on the steel breeze
Come on you boy child, you winner and loser
Come on you miner for truth and delusion, and shine!

Wish You Were Here (1975) Pink Floyd

So, so you think you can tell
Heaven from Hell
Blue skies from pain?
Can you tell a green field
From a cold steel rail?
A smile from a veil?
Do you think you can tell?

And did they get you to trade
Your heroes for ghosts?
Hot ashes for trees?
Hot air for a cool breeze?
Cold comfort for change?
And did you exchange
A walk on part in the war
For a leading role in a cage?

How I wish, how I wish you were here
We're just two lost souls
Swimming in a fish bowl
Year after year
Running over the same old ground
What have we found?
The same old fears
Wish you were here

Needle And The Damage Done (1972) Neil Young

I caught you knockin' at my cellar door
"I love you, baby. Can I have some more?"
Ooh, ooh, the damage done

I hit the city and I lost my band
I watched the needle take another man
Gone, gone, the damage done

I sing the song, because I love the man
I know that some of you don't understand
Milk-blood to keep from running out

I've seen the needle and the damage done
A little part of it in everyone
But every junkie's like a settin' sun