

The Origins and History of Rock Music

Rock's Origins (1940s-1960s)

Rock's origins was around the late 1940s, when the popular styles of the day, country music and blues, changed into a new sound based on electric guitars and a regular drumbeat. The first rock artists of the 1950s used the classic blues structures for their compositions. In contrast to the safe pop music of the decade, the rock had an aggressive attack and suggested a sexual freedom that was shocking during that conservative age.

By the early '60s, the Rolling Stones expanded rock's limits producing great albums of songs. Sex and youthful rebellion were always in their music and for that reason, the Stones had many critics but also elevated rock to new cultural heights.

Rock's Evolution (1970s)

As rock music became the dominant style of popular music, new bands copied their predecessors' style while they tried to experiment with new sounds. Led Zeppelin gave rock a darker, heavier tone. They were one of the '70s' most popular bands and they helped to create a new style known as hard rock or heavy metal. Around the same time, Pink Floyd added psychedelic elements and complex music, creating concept albums with a single theme.

In the late '70s, in response to the psychedelic bands such as Pink Floyd, groups like the Sex Pistols and the Clash simplified rock to its basic ingredients: loud guitars, rude attitude, and angry singing. Punk was born.

Rock's Fragmentation (1980s)

When the '80s began, mainstream rock was losing commercial connection and the sub-styles used that moment to start their dominance. English bands such as Depeche Mode demonstrated a more introverted songwriting style, creating post-punk, also described as new wave.

By the end of the '80s, college rock was a lucrative alternative to classic rock that it received a new nickname: alternative rock. It was also called indie rock because the bands were often signed to small and independent labels.

Rock's Re-Emergence (1990s-Present)

With the ascension of Nirvana in 1991, alternative rock (grunge) became the dominant popular music. After the suicide of Nirvana's leader Kurt Cobain, alternative music started to lose popularity by the middle of the decade, in favor of mainstream rock.

One of the most famous bands to after Nirvana was Limp Bizkit, which mixed hard rock and rap into a hybrid call rap-rock. The band Red Hot Chili Peppers, emerged during grunge's days but with a different style and they continued to find audiences along the '90s. Additionally, other groups that were born from grunge, among them Foo Fighters, incorporated the energy of alternative music to re-energize mainstream rock.

As rock music entered the 21st century, the most successful bands had the same spirit as their '60s predecessors. There is no doubt rock music will continue its evolution, using its rich history while continuing to keep its ear open for the next style reinvention.