
Is the music no longer good or are you just getting old?

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People of my generation and older generally aren't qualified to comment on the state of music today. I'm 30 years old and I have to concede that my peers and I long entered the stage of our lives in which we start to sound more and more like our parents. We moan about a depressingly common range of subjects including rising prices, corrupt politicians and how there's no good music being made anymore.

As much as this viewpoint resonates with me, we must acknowledge that a large part of our moaning has more to do with age than reality. Most of my peers can't remember the last time they discovered a new artist they appreciate. It's no coincidence that most of them no longer make an effort to find good music. Back when I was in high school, I could literally spend the entire day at home with the TV on nothing but music channels and I know this to be a common childhood memory.

Throughout school, right up to varsity, my friends and I would be genuinely excited whenever we discovered a new artist we appreciated. We'd go out of our way to get their albums, listen to them religiously, discuss what makes their music great and generally make that artist a part of our lives. At least until the next new exciting musician came along. For most people, that sort of devotion to music reduces close to the point of extinction once they enter the working world. And I don't blame them.

Work life doesn't support music devotion. You spend most of your day in an office where listening to music is generally inappropriate and by the time you get home you're too exhausted to do anything but fix yourself up some dinner and then pass out in front of the TV. And once you have children, even that last part becomes a luxury. This lifestyle makes it hard to actively seek out and collect new music. And that's the problem.

You can't expect to discover anything new you enjoy when you're not exposing yourself to new things. That's as true of music as it is for anything else in life. Nonetheless, those days of MTV-fueled music devotion are firmly behind me; now I can barely watch a music channel for five minutes without wondering why they're airing softcore porn during the daytime, albeit with a catchy soundtrack.

Most of us cling to the albums we enjoyed as teenagers. And the inevitable effect is that you lose touch. I firmly believe that there is such a thing as timeless music, that there are songs and whole albums that remain just as moving, powerful and 'relevant' today as they were when they were first released, in some cases decades ago. But there's also such a thing as the taste of the times.

Taste in mainstream music is constantly evolving as new listeners and musicians keep coming of age and knocking the previous generation off their position of dominance. So when you cut yourself off from new music, the times change without you and you get left behind such that when you do finally switch on the radio you literally can't understand what's going on. You're trying to judge 2020 music with 2000's sensibilities. It can't work.

It's always been the case that one generation's experience of the world will be radically different from the last, but the internet age has accelerated that. When I was a teenager, saving up money and waiting months until the release date to go to the record store and buy the latest CD from your favourite artist was a rite of passage.

Thanks to streaming services, my younger siblings will probably never even have to leave the house to listen to all the music they want, and this is by no means a bad thing. I for one have embraced the technology. The same kind of algorithms that ensure Google knows you better than your own mother also helps Spotify keep recommending you music you might like based on your previous choices.

My favourite music genre is indie rock and I'm constantly overwhelmed at how much good new indie rock music is out there. I have a backlog of albums to listen to that increases at a faster rate than I can keep up. To a lesser extent I'm also big on hip-hop and while it's harder for me to find good new music in that genre there are definitely still good discoveries to be made.

I'm not quite sure how I've managed to avoid falling into the cynicism towards contemporary music that's captured most of my peers. Maybe it's the uniqueness of the indie genre, maybe my hunger for fresh music is stronger than most or maybe I just have too much free time on my hands. All I know is that having a conversation with a friend who insists that there's no good music being made anymore and thinking 'What the hell are you talking about?' has become far too common an experience for me.

At the end of the day every generation thinks the music they listened to growing up was great and that the kids of nowadays are listening to garbage. I do still love the music I discovered in my youth and I revisit it from time to time but I don't dwell on it because there's still great music being made every day.

You don't have to agree with me though. Feel free to write off this essay as the ranting of a man who refuses to see reality. But the next time you feel like moaning about how nobody makes good music anymore, perhaps you could actually try to prove yourself wrong by going out of your way to find somebody who does. You might just surprise yourself.