

## SEX, DRUGS, AND ROCK & ROLL: A LIBERTARIAN VIEW

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**Andrew Ian Dodge**

The religious and the straight-laced in the world have always looked upon rock & roll as a shining example of libertinism. I would posit that, on the contrary, rock & roll, more specifically, hard rock and heavy metal, are libertarianism in action.

The hard rock scene and some of its side-genres are a good indicator of how open the young populace would be to libertarian ideals and ideas. It appears that if most of youth are concerned with sex, drugs, and rock & roll (henceforth referred to as SDR&R), then there is a good chance your country is doing well.

I've been in the "business" of hard rock/heavy metal for 20 years and listening to it for 23. Ever since I heard the opening notes to *Number of the Beast* and heard the wails of Vince Neil of Motley Crue, I was hooked. After this awakening in my 13<sup>th</sup> year, I have bought, collected, and reviewed thousands of hard rock and heavy metal albums. It was not until I began to DJ on my university radio station that I began to identify the specific music I preferred. My listeners would party during my two-, then five-, and eventually seven-hour show. They would request songs about love, lust, anger, heartache, and horror, but never anything with a message. Ultimately, I learned what my listeners really wanted was an escape from reality.

I didn't really appreciate it at the time, but when the 90s kicked in, I missed the 80s. Gone were the party anthems of Poison, Kiss, Motley Crue, and Hanoi Rocks, and the sex innuendo of Whitesnake, Aerosmith, Dogs D'Amour, and AC/DC. Gone was the escapism of Anthrax, Iron Maiden, and Megadeth. In its place, rock radio played the whining and moaning of angst-ridden males and females. Alanis Morissette and Pearl Jam were whining about how bad everything was. Seattle, instead of producing glamour girls like Heart, and prog-kings, Queensryche, was steeped in the misery and moroseness of heroin.

It was no longer how to get laid, it was how to avoid killing yourself. Record companies took notice and started ditching feel-good rock for feel-miserable rock. In addition, the message of this music was decidedly left-wing. Pinching ideas from the sub-genres like punk and hardcore, grunge/angst rock was in full flow. Even Michael Jackson got in on the act with his vomit-inducing odes to current feel-good subjects.

It was almost a decade before mainstream rock came out of its misery. There still exists the dark element in popular bands like Slipnot and Marilyn Manson, but a new wave of album oriented/melodic rock (AOR), and heavy metal is emerging, replacing the depressing music of the past. Even rap-rock bands sensed the change; a song called *Nookie*, by the ironically named Limp Bizkit, can only mean sex is back on the agenda, again.

The glam/rock of the 80s coincided with a time of unprecedented wealth and success. The 90s, with its angst-laden lyrics, paralleled a recession. This is no co-incidence. What do these observations have to do with libertarianism? I would argue, a great deal. When the populace's thoughts are on SDR&R, that is when they are most amenable to libertarian ideas. After all, that is the life they are living. They want to be left alone to get on with it, free from meddling of the state or other statist institutions (like the church) telling them how to behave and what to do.

The rock & roll lifestyle is liberty in action; get the message out to willing minds and you might just keep them over time. After all, rock musicians are entrepreneurs and, for the most part, yuppies in the making. They originate mostly from lower or lower middle class backgrounds. They sacrifice a stable future to pursue their dreams by creating something that others will wish to buy. They are naturally resistant to statist regulation, whether labeling or censorship and performance laws. They want drugs legalized so they do not have to risk getting arrested in their

pursuit of the SDR&R lifestyle. By definition, hard rock/heavy metal musicians opt out of the norms that the state and statist wish them to adhere to. Rock stars inspire others to follow their lead.

Looking at the lyrics, we see that anti-statist messages are fairly common. Whether or not bands realize it, that is the drift of their writing. Lyrics range from railing against small town statism to the interference of national and supra-national governments. Sex laws, policing, and war all come in for consideration. Whether it is Megadeth questioning *Peace Sells... But Who's Buying?*, Metallica's *Master of Puppets*, or Iron Maiden's *The Trooper*, they all decry the state waging pointless war. Small town blues are railed against in Twisted Sister's *We're not Going to Take It, Welcome to the Jungle* by Guns & Roses, and *Let's Get Rocked* by Def Leppard. Hypocrisy in religion is tackled by Ozzy Osborne in *Miracle Man*. Even the Phil Collins-fronted Genesis took a slap at televangelists in their hey-day. Rush, Metallica, Megadeth, Iron Maiden, and Bonfire have all railed against the crushing hand of the state. Of course, Rush have extremely sound libertarian/Randian credentials with the release of an entire album inspired by Rand, *2112*.

And then, of course, there are the elements central to the SDR&R lifestyle: sex and drugs. Praise of sex and rants against prudishness are numerous. Praise of drugs, in all forms, are numerous and frequent. George Thurgood's *I drink Alone*, AC/DC's *Have a Drink on Me*, and WASP's *Blind in Texas* have spawned many a drink. Less numerous but still somewhat common are warnings about the dangers of these activities. It is, however, rare that these songs instruct or admonish the listener. Rather, they inform about possible results of these activities. Examples of this trend are Ozzy Osborne, frequently, Enuff Znuft's *Fly High Michelle*, and Guns & Roses *Mr Brownstone*. Hard rock and heavy metal rarely lecture but frequently inform. These songs rely on listeners to take personal responsibility and make their own decisions. This is in sharp contrast to the music of the 90s, which contained strong instructions on how to live one's life. Libertarian 'take responsibility': this is the right message.

With its emphasis on "doing one's own thing" and "individualism", Rock & Roll really is the music of liberty.

I lived these ideals one weekend at the "GODS" of AOR gig in Bradford. The mini-festival lasted from noon to 2am starting on a Sunday. There was lots of long hair, tight leather, and denim to behold. This leads me to pointing out a few misconceptions about the world of hard rock and heavy metal. First of all, it is necessary to end the perception that all metal-heads (of whatever variety) are knuckle-dragging morons with only a basic ability for speech and the IQ of a newt. Metal heads come in all levels of intelligence, although "average" seems to be relatively under-represented. In my experience most of us are either above average intelligence or significantly below. The subject has come up several times with my fellow travelers in the world of hard rock, and much of the time there is consensus on this conclusion. I know at least one geneticist who used to splice genes listening to AC/DC. The man who could potentially create new forms of life was a metal-head. It is highly amusing to note he was also an Indian Hindu and not the whitebread cliché so often associated with the genre. I know of many highly successful, driven individuals who are into this sort of music. In some cases the more driven they are the more extreme the music; for instance a certain character who has a blog called Samizdata is into dark-wave and goth metal.

It is possible that the perception of stupidity comes from contact with a few metalheads who might be bright but are so stoned out of their gourd to appear to be idiots. Much like at sporting events, intelligent men or women in a group can turn into a mob of morons with the right encouragement. Being amused or even aroused by a singer simulating sex with the stage (part of Bret Michaels of Poison's repertoire) is a sign of the mob mentality, surely? Intensely lame "sing-alongs" or worse, crowd cheering contests, makes one wonder if all in the venue left their brains with their coats in the cloak-room.

There is also the problem that many of the purveyors of the music are not exactly that intelligent. They may be amazing musicians, but like athletes, they can be amazingly stupid off-stage.

I have interviewed some absolute morons (Dizzy Dean Davidson of Britney Fox take a bow), incapable of speaking in even the slightest bit of coherent manner. This, of course, varies a great deal depending on the sub-genre; symphonic metal/progressive musicians tend to be well-educated and highly intelligent men and women while some death metal & hard rock bands considerably less so. How bright do you have to be to write songs about having sex, getting drunk, and partying?

With the increase in sub-genres of the overall genre, there seems to be a sorting of those who like the music. There are certain types of gigs where you can expect the preponderance of the fans to be young, male, and fairly thick, for instance. There are also regional variations. I find the caliber of people at death/doom metal gigs in the UK is higher than it is in the US. This might have something to do with the amount of people in the US who take death metal at its face value rather than as a chance to vent a bit. It might amuse some of you that there are two “camps” in the death metal world, depending on what side of the Atlantic one hails from, with the UK splitting down the middle. You find that deathmetal-ers in the US tend to loathe the European brand since it may contain female vocals, keyboards and even orchestral arrangements. The American version tends to feature a man grunting or screaming, with his cohorts playing as fast and as brutally as possible. Death metal on this side of the pond contains a melody; it does not on the other side. It is even possible to write a book on the sub-genres of hard rock and heavy metal. My friend Martin Popoff does a very fine line in specialist books on the subject.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention the softer side of hard rock/heavy metal; that of AOR. (Even metalheads have a soft side.) A brand of music that was so out of fashion that it had to go to Nashville to get noticed again (Shania Twain, Faith Hill, Lonestar) is now making a bit of a comeback. It combines the power of guitars, bass, and drums with softer vocals and tender lyrics. Hard Rock produces the ballads that rockers shag to, the drinking songs they drink to, and the party songs they party to. Hard Rock tends to be a more equal male to female type gig.

In its heyday I went to many gigs where there were more women than men in attendance. Bands like Def Leppard, Poison, Whitesnake and Motley Crue were good at “pulling” the females into the gigs, many of the men, on the other hand, were there to pull the highly agitated females in the audience. Or as one of my friends (a woman) put it when asked what on earth she was going to a hard rock gig for: “the single women there want to sleep with the lead singer and the men that go want to sleep with the single women.” It is a quite simple idea; let some better looking guy on stage do the getting a woman all hot & bothered and then move in for the kill.

This type of music tends to be fairly heterosexual, while some of the truly harder types of the metal music (goth, industrial, darkwave, death) attract gay men, transvestites, and the fetishists. Even so, you could argue bands like Manowar with their leather thongs, chiseled naked torsos and good looks could be seen as a bit “camp”. (Think Chippendales with musical instruments and little talent to play them.)

I recently attended a Mortiiis concert where the crowd could have been seen as a preview audience for the next weekend's Torture Garden bash. Clothing choices ranged from fetish, through cybergoth, to goth and metal-heads. Leather, denim, pvc, rubber, as well as satin and lace were there for all to see. Ironically, the difference between a lot of so-called “bondage” clothes and “metal” clothes is just where you bought it. Ann Summers charges twice as much for a leather dress as the ‘metal’ clothier down the street. Metal and hard-rock is neither music for Neanderthals nor is it only for maladjusted and socially inept men. It is for those who don't like their music trendy or to be on *Top of the Pops* every week. HR/HM is as diverse and individualistic as it wants to be, a true example of liberty and free will in action.