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Women In The Arts

May 3, 2018

Women In Rock N' Roll

In the 1950's, Jazz and Blues music had been combined and morphed to become the newest and most sensational genre of the time. The artists most people remember at the forefront of the industry were men like Chuck Berry, Elvis Presley, and The Beatles. However, since the genre's inception, women have been helping shape the music that ended up shaping many generations to come. Music of the mid 20th century was largely based on image, Elvis Presley being a prime example of this. This aspect of the music industry has both helped and hindered women in their roles in Rock music. The use of sexual innuendos in music and physical performance has almost defined the genre for most of its existence, especially with the male artists. In most other genres like Pop and RNB, women used these concepts to their advantage. However, Rock N' Roll provided an alternative to this, allowing women to express themselves in different ways, involving lyrics and messages about politics, love, heartbreak, and general strife. While the 1950's did see the original "birth" of Rock N' Roll, the most spectacular women of Rock mainly came into popularity in the 1960's and 1970's. Some of these artists included Janis Joplin, Stevie Nicks, and Joan Jett. These women went on to influence many artists, male and female, for years to come.

Janis Joplin debuted in 1967, using a unique blend of blues, pop, and rock to captivate millions of fans who had never seen such intensity and talent from a female vocalist. Born in Texas and arguably the most well known and successful female rock performer of her era, her

powerful blues style evoked the spirit of the south. As a child, she sang in church, and her interest in music developed from the gospel stylings she heard while there. She was not one to blend in with the crowd, however. She had her own distinct style that she flaunted, in her singing and her personality and style. She was influenced and trained mainly by male musicians of the time, and also derived a lot of her lyrical ability from poetry. Her influences included Bessie Smith, Ma Rainey, and Ruth Brown, who were all blues singers. She had a reputation for being tough and for drinking heavily. She attended the University of Texas in Austin, studying art. She formed a band with some of her classmates and began playing small clubs and bars. She later traveled from coast to coast furthering her career. However, her drinking and drug use escalated quickly and she died at the peak of her career. Her quick rise to fame is well remembered and her style was unsurpassed. Janis Joplin is quoted saying "When I'm there, I'm not here," she once said. "I can't talk about my singing. I'm inside it. How can you describe something you're inside of?" Her intense and meaningful music struck a chord with millions of women, who had never had an artist air out their struggles in this style

Stevie Nicks derived much influence from blues and rock artists like Janis Joplin, however, she also used many aspects of the popular folk music of the time like Joan Baez. Her style was very dramatic and theatrical, similarly to many male rockstars of the time like Led Zeppelin and Rush. Hailing from Phoenix, born in 1948, her grandfather built her a guitar when she was 5 years old and taught her country music from the 50's. The two of them ended up playing together at local bars. When the family relocated to the Bay Area, Stevie met Lindsey Buckingham, another singer and guitarist. They later joined the rock group Fleetwood Mac in 1974, bringing Nicks' career to new heights. The band sold millions of records worldwide and

Stevie Nicks' onstage persona of extravagant movement and singing mesmerized audiences. Their album "Rumours" was number 1 on the Billboard charts for 31 weeks and won the Grammy for album of the year. In the 80's she launched her solo project and continued her successful rise, still touring and releasing music to this day. Stevie Nicks's influence has lasted to this day as well. Popular modern pop singer Taylor Swift said after performing with Nicks, "It's a fairy tale and an honor to share the stage with Stevie Nicks." Stevie Nicks was able to soften Rock N' Roll and make it seem more relatable than ever before. A big part of her success and influence was that she wrote from the female perspective. Her lyrics about heartbreak and the everyday struggles of womanhood were delivered with raw emotion, provoking the audience like never before.

Like Stevie Nicks, Joan Jett took an already established style of Rock N' Roll and made it her own. At the age of 15, Jett broke into the male dominated world of Punk Rock with her band The Runaways. She started playing guitar at the age of 14, and was heavily inspired by the glam rock stars of the mid 70's such as Marc Bolan of T. Rex and David Bowie. In 1976, The Runaways released their first album and their single "Cherry Bomb" became an instant hit on the Punk Rock charts. In the following years, she took over as the frontwoman of the group, and later started a solo career. After working with legendary members of the Sex Pistols, Paul Cook and Steve Jones, Jett moved to Los Angeles, but was unable to get an actual record deal. In 1980, she formed her own record label in Blackheart Records, making her the first female artist to own and control an independent record company. With her newly formed band, The Blackhearts, her song "I Love Rock N' Roll" became a staple of the genre and lives on as one of the standout Rock songs from any and every era. Dave Grohl, of Nirvana, in a Rolling Stone interview, sums

up how influential Joan Jett was, describing her influence in the punk rock genre, “None of that would have happened without Joan as a rung on the ladder.” With her deep and gravelly voice, short black spiked hair, and leather pants, she revolutionized the punk rock genre to be all inclusive of genders.

The main theme connecting all these artists is that they were able to bring the female perspective into such a male dominated genre like Rock N’ Roll. From the nuances in their lyrics to their unique physical performances, these musicians were able to captivate worldwide audiences when no other women had been successful at this before. Rock N’ Roll, and especially Punk Rock, have been led by male fronted bands since the inception of these genres, however this didn’t leave much room for relatability when it comes to the female rock fans. In addition, these women influenced different artists, male and female, for generations to come, being responsible for helping create many of the greatest and most successful rock acts of all time.

Women In Rock N' Roll Bibliography

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