

## Outerlimits out of bounds

commentary by Greg Pohl

On Friday, September 23rd, the Outerlimits Club presented an 80 minute video entitled "Rock and Roll — A Search for God". About 100 people attended the screening, which attempted to portray rock music as a powerful force controlled by the Devil. Although Blair Donnelly, a minister associated with Outerlimits, tried to answer questions after the video, his knowledge of the music discussed was quite poor. He seemed much more interested in recruiting people for the club. Regardless of his intentions, the video itself was an attack on a very popular form of entertainment, so I felt that it deserved a closer look.

The video used some very convoluted logic to convince us of the satanic nature of rock music. For instance, it suggested that since a rise in suicides and violence among the young coincides with the rise of rock and roll, the music must be the cause. Never mind other factors, like the deterioration of our environment, overcrowding of the planet, and the proliferation of nuclear arms. (Hey, maybe rock music caused all those things as well!).

Another ploy of the video was to assume that *any* biblical symbol or event alluded to in rock must be evil. Styx is attacked for using a cornerstone as a symbol. This is considered to be blasphemous, since in the bible, Jesus is said to be the cornerstone of God's house. Excuse me, but I wasn't aware that Christianity had a patent on cornerstones, not to mention other symbols like fish, loaves, grain, serpents, instruments of capital punishment, etc. It is even suggested to us that punkers, with their safety-pin adornments, are evil, simply because the bible *mentions* people stabbing themselves with swords.

Basically, the video presented three types of evidence: occult references, the products of R 'n R, and backwards masking. Yes, there are some occult references in music. Unfortunately there are some pop-metal bands whose lack of talent forces them to use controversy to sell records. However, several of the examples given, such as the 'lightning S' of Black Sabbath, and the symbolism on the Talking Heads LP "Little Creatures", are open to

interpretation. Overall, truly satanic music is a very small proportion of rock music, and is bought primarily by rebellious youngsters trying to piss off their parents. Ignore it and it will lose its popularity.

The video goes on to cite sexual preoccupation and rebellion as the products of rock and roll. Music portrays the thoughts and events of the day. It does not control society; it is merely a yardstick by which one can measure the state of society. In the '60s, we had protest music; in the '70s, we had music of the sexual revolution; and now music deals with global issues such as hunger and human rights. Music does not create the times, the times create the music.

On to backwards masking. This is a process which supposedly creates an intelligible message in a song when it is played backwards. Unlike the

obvious inverted tape loops of songs such as Pink Floyd's "Empty Spaces", it is impossible to detect these supposed messages when the song is played forwards. The narrator of the video acknowledges that there is absolutely no evidence that these messages affect listeners in any way. He claims to be interested not in what they convey, but in how the messages got there. However, after arguing that they must be the work of the Devil, he proceeds to rant about the evil content anyway.

The trick to these messages is that the audience is told *what* they are going to hear before the passage is played. The listener is then inclined to fit the suggested interpretation onto the gibberish. This has been shown scientifically. When provided with a backwards passage *and* an interpretation of its content, listeners claimed to have heard the message in the music. Then a second group of people listened to the same passage, and were asked simply,

"What did you hear?". They either heard no message at all, or claimed to hear things completely different from what the first group claimed to hear. So the narrator of the video merely convinces people that they have heard something where nothing intelligible exists. If anyone still has any doubt, try listening to these supposed messages *before* anyone tells you what you are hearing, and see if you still hear their "evil messages".

When the video is examined critically in this manner, its argument seems almost laughable. What is certainly not funny, though, is the extreme intolerance exhibited towards other religions. For example, John Denver is attacked for his belief in EST, and Van Morrison is criticized for citing Celtic literature as an influence. As well, songs such as George Harrison's "Life Itself" are considered by the video to be blasphemous for placing Christianity on an equal footing with other religions. Whatever hap-

pened to freedom of religious thought? These people do not want to admit it, but Christianity is not the only system of belief in the world.

The presentation concludes with the narrator telling us to abandon rock music and to welcome God. He says that it's the Devil talking to us when we say to ourselves; "let's think about this for a few days, and not do anything rash". This is quite a reversal from the beginning of the video, when he told us; "I've got something that's gonna change your life, but you're gonna have to listen, and you're gonna have to *think for yourself*" (their emphasis). The Outerlimits people discredit themselves and embarrass fellow Christians when they present material like this. How do they expect anyone to take them seriously?

My only hope is that this talk of messages and symbolism will motivate a few more people to listen more closely and realize how rewarding music can be.

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