

Chapter 11 Psychedelic Rock

The late sixties was a period of experimentation and innovation in rock music and the values it expressed. Many of those values were influenced by the work of writers and poets known as the *Beats*---from the word *beatific*, meaning blissfully happy. Some of these were Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, and Gregory Corso. Their followers were called beatniks. These writers and others believed that inner peace could be achieved only when one was completely free of the artificial constraints of society. Ginsberg maintained that America was not the land of the free. Rather, he saw this country as one that was hypocritical and oppressive. Some citizens, he said, were despised and legislated against because of their rejection of conventional morality and their choice of nontraditional lifestyles.

The desire for freedom expressed by the Beats was an attempt to copy the creativity and individuality they saw in the music of the *Bebop Jazz* musicians, Charlie Bird Parker, Thelonius Monk, and Dizzy Gillespie. Other later musicians playing *cool jazz* were also influenced. These included Miles Davis, Gerry Mulligan, and Chico Hamilton. These jazz styles were played by very small combos and a written chart was not necessary. Frequently, all the musicians would use would be a set of chord changes and a song title. They would improvise from there.

Listen to Miles Davis, Dizzy Gillespie, Ella Fitzgerald---Birdland (1:3)

From Howl

by Allen Ginsberg

For Carl Solomon

I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked,

dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for an angry fix,

angelheaded hipsters burning for the ancient heavenly connection to the starry dynamo in the machinery of night,

who poverty and tatters and hollow-eyed and high sat up smoking in the supernatural darkness of cold-water flats 'doating across the tops of cities contemplating jazz,

who bared their brains to Heaven under the El and saw Mohammedan angels staggering on tenement roofs illuminated,

who passed through universities with radiant cool eyes hallucinating Arkansas and Blake-light tragedy among the scholars of war,

who were expelled from the academies for crazy & publishing obscene odes on the windows of the skull,

Dr. Tony A. Mowrer

who cowered in unshaven rooms in underwear, burning their money in wastebaskets and listening to the Terror through the wall,

who wept at the romance of the streets with their pushcarts full of onions and bad music,

who sat in boxes breathing in the darkness under the bridge, and rose up to build harpsichords in their lofts,

who coughed on the sixth floor of Harlem crowned with flame under the tubercular sky surrounded by orange crates of theology,

who scribbled all night rocking and rolling over lofty incantations which in the yellow morning were stanzas of gibberish,

who cooked rotten animals lung heart feet tail borsht & tortillas dreaming of the pure vegetable kingdom,

who plunged themselves under meat trucks looking for an egg,

who threw their watches off the roof to cast their ballot for Eternity outside of Time, & alarm clocks fell on their heads every day for the next decade,

and rose reincarnate in the ghostly clothes of jazz in the goldhorn shadow of the band and blew the suffering of America's naked mind for love into an eli eli lamma lamma sabacthani saxophone cry that shivered the cities down to the last radio

with the absolute heart of the poem of life butchered out of their own bodies good to eat a thousand years.

1956

The Beats would often meet in coffee houses to perform and listen to their readings. The relationship between jazz and the poetry made it appealing for live jazz to be played at the same time the poems were being read. The Beat movement actually began in New York, but moved to San Francisco at the urging of Lawrence Ferlinghetti, the owner of the City Lights Bookshop, City Lights Press, and The City Lights Journal. The Beat writers were strongly criticized at the time of their writings and were not accepted as literature until the 70's. Some of the writers of the Beat movement remained in San Francisco, or returned, in order to be a part of the psychedelic counterculture centered there during the 60's.

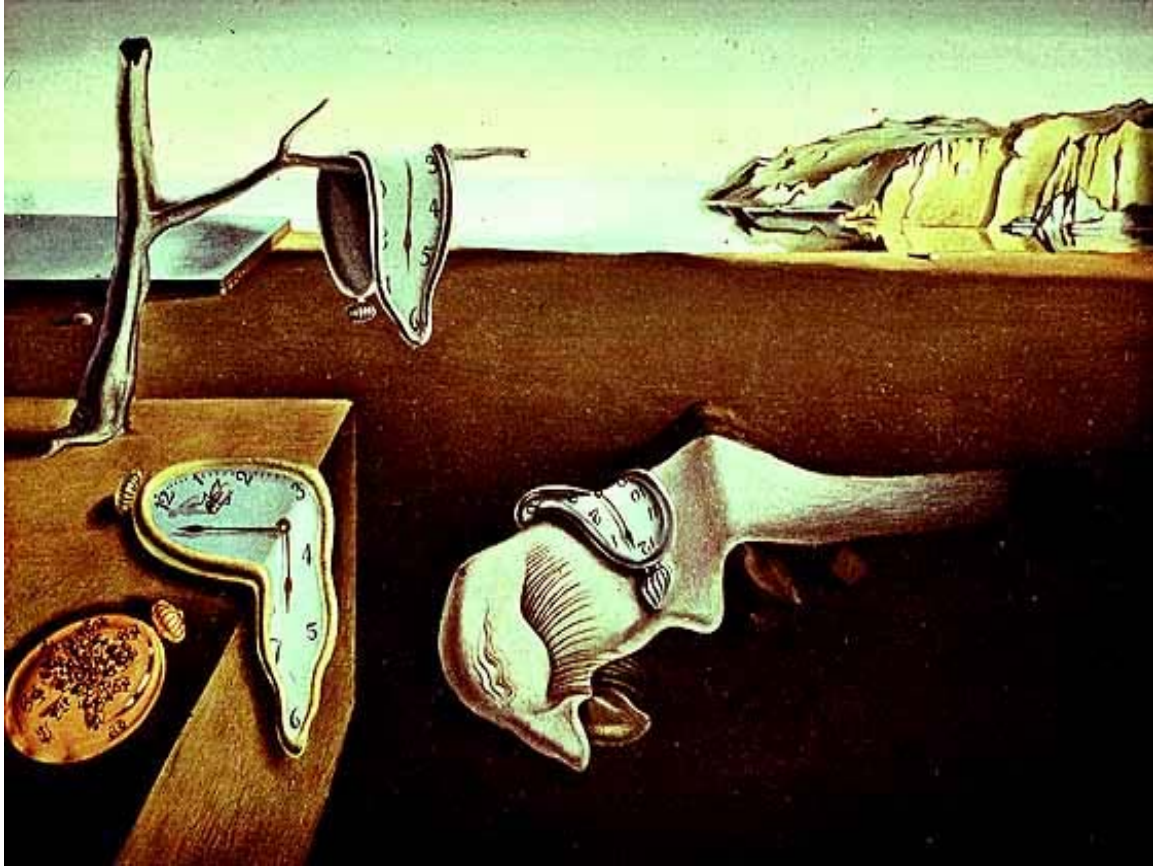
The San Francisco Sound

The beat movement had actually taken place during the 50's, a decade before they were "re-discovered" by the generation of the 60's. The political upheaval of the 60's had caused young people to re-evaluate the values of their parents. They began to feel that society had become money grubbing and materialistic and values such as love, freedom, and personal worth had lost their significance. The wish to return to basic human values led to a new culture, or counterculture. This movement was referred to as the hippie movement and took place all across America, but was more prominent in cities, such as San Francisco. Hippies stood for peace, free love, and nonmaterialism. They often stood out from the rest of society by wearing loose, casual clothing, sporting long hair, and maintaining a lifestyle often centered on communal sharing of possessions.

The use of mind altering drugs psychedelic drugs, such as LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide, a.k.a. acid) also became common among the subculture, giving the name psychedelic rock (or acid rock) to the music favored by San Francisco's hippies. LSD was not declared illegal until late 1966, so it was readily available at parties and concerts. LSD gave the feeling of timelessness, unreal and rather dreamlike connections between thoughts, and vivid hallucinations. Musicians tried to recreate these effects in their music.

One instrument that became popular among psychedelic groups was the sitar. One reason for this was the interest in Eastern philosophy. Another reason was the hypnotic effect the instrument could have on a listener. Another instrument that became popular was the Indian tamboura, a drone instrument.

Dreamlike visions were recreated in psychedelic artwork on posters and album covers, as well as in light shows at concerts. Much of this artwork was taken from works of surrealist painters in the early to middle 20th century. The surrealist style had developed as a visual expression of studies of the unconscious mind by Sigmund Freud. Salvador Dali (1904-1989) painted scenes of recognizable objects in shapes or functions in which they could not really exist. One of his best-known paintings is *The Persistence of Memory*. Surrealist art took things outside of or beyond reality and was the perfect visual for psychedelic music.



The Persistence of Memory, Salvador Dali (1931)

<http://www.usc.edu/schools/annenberg/asc/projects/comm544/library/images/341bg.jpg>

The philosophy of existentialism was originally developed by Soren Kierkegaard and expanded by Jean-Paul Sartre. For the hippies, this philosophy stressed the importance of freeing the individual from the hostility of the outside, tradition-bound world. Once freed, individuals would not be restrained by the expectations of others and could act as their own personal moods or beliefs dictated. They were, however, required to take responsibility for their own actions. The hippies who embraced existentialism felt free to drop out of the world of their parents and they felt free to refuse to fight in Viet Nam. If they refused to register for the draft, they had to choose whether to be jailed or to leave the country.

The freedom felt by the hippies led to the *First Human Be-In* in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park in 1967. Beat poets read to the crowd and music was performed by the Quicksilver Messenger Service, the Grateful Dead, and Jefferson Airplane. This event attracted many like-minded people to San Francisco and led to many other *love-ins* in many parts of the country, including Woodstock, in New York in 1969.

To obtain the illusion of the hallucinatory experience, the musician would play long instrumental improvisations on one or two repeating chords, often involving one musician responding to what another had just played. Perhaps no other group mastered the techniques of extended improvisations than The Grateful Dead, a name the founder, Jerry Garcia (1942-1995) claimed to have discovered in an ancient Egyptian prayer. Garcia was initially a guitarist and bluegrass banjo player. He, along with guitarist, Bob Wier, and keyboard/harmonica player, Ron *Pigpen* McKernan played together in *Mother McCree's Uptown Jug Champions*. They changed their name to the Warlocks when they switched to electric instruments in 1965 and were joined by bass player, Phil Lesh and drummer, Bill Kreutzmann. That same year, they changed their name to the Grateful Dead and joined other San Francisco based groups for free concerts and acid parties.

The Grateful Dead's commercial recordings show their ability to blend country, folk, blues, and Latin influences with rock. Unfortunately, the vinyl recordings were unable to capture the excitement of their live performances. When they did record a live album, they called it *Live Dead*. The album contained several of the long improvisations for which the group had become famous. The entire first side was one composition, *Dark Star*, a continuous improvisation.

Listen to the Grateful Dead---Dark Star (2:5)---Listen to as much as time/students allow

Pieces like this were not commercial because they didn't appeal to listeners who wanted short, catchy songs they could sing along with. *Dark Star* and pieces like it could never fit onto 45 RPM records and they were not suitable for AM radio---the most typical radio signal of the time. Like the Grateful Dead, most other psychedelic rock groups faced similar difficulties. The changes in the music and demands of its fans brought about changes in rock radio.

Before the late 60's, rock music had been played on AM stations. These stations received their financial support from advertisers that required them to play music from the top ten or top forty in order to appeal to the largest possible audience. AM radio (amplitude modulation) was a system that could carry sound beyond *line of site*, but also carried a lot of static and could not be transmitted in stereo, at that time. FM radio (frequency modulation) had been invented in the 30's, but did not come into widespread use until the 60's. FM could transmit in stereo and could transmit *noise-free* music. But, FM also carried a much shorter distance. Consequently, FM, initially, received funding to transmit classical music because those listeners demanded a higher quality of sound transmission. Soon, some subscriber stations appeared. Finally, a number of FM stations began broadcasting rock music and became the primary vehicle for the broadcast of psychedelic rock and other *underground* music that was ignored by the AM stations. Tom Donahue, a former top-40 disc jockey rejected the pop station format and started a psychedelic station in San Francisco. The station aired extended cuts and featured new and non-commercial bands.

Several members of the Grateful Dead were as comfortable with country music as they were with rock. This is evident in other albums they recorded in 1970. The music on these albums was based on more organized arrangements than music from *Live Dead*.

Listen to the Grateful Dead---Uncle John's Band (1:5)

By 1970 the Grateful Dead's psychedelic mixture of country, blues, and whatever else they were in the mood for attracted *dead heads*. These were fans who followed the Grateful Dead from concert to concert, selling food, posters, jewelry, pottery, and other wares. The group experienced several personnel changes during the 70's and even disbanded from 1974-1976. Hard-core fans remained true and the grateful Dead maintained popularity even through the 80's. The era came to an abrupt end with the death of founder, Jerry Garcia, in 1995. Surviving members of the band agreed they *might* play together again some day, but they didn't feel it would be right to perform under the same name without Garcia.

The Quicksilver Messenger Service was a group that frequently shared billing with the Grateful Dead. They were also known for long jam sessions consisting of instrumental improvisations. These were better appreciated live, in concert, than they were on record. *The Fool* (1967), was an extended improvisation on two chords, but also had a subtle bolero rhythm pattern repeated throughout.

Listen to Quicksilver Messenger Service---The Fool (1:7)

Jefferson Airplane was one of the most commercially popular psychedelic bands. It was formed in 1965 by singer, Marty Balin, and guitarist/singer, Paul Kantner. At first, the group played folk rock, but soon changed to a sound with a harder edge. Grace Slick joined the group when singer, Signe Anderson left. Slick's dramatic voice and stage appearance became the hallmark of Jefferson Airplane's sound and style. She recorded *Somebody to Love* and *White Rabbit*, first with Great Society and then with Jefferson Airplane. Both songs became statements of the hippie counterculture's belief in free love and drugs.

White Rabbit was based on Lewis Carroll's Alice in Wonderland (1865). The strange, dreamlike manipulation of the physical world Alice experienced in Wonderland was recalled in the song, which was banned in some cities because of its drug implications. It made reference to a world that changed after Alice took pills and ate mushrooms. Musically, the song is interesting because it uses the *Phrygian* mode and bolero-influenced rhythms.

Listen to Jefferson Airplane---White Rabbit (1:8)

Much of Jefferson Airplane's music was commercial because it consisted of short, single-length songs with vocals and a strong backbeat. But, they also used long improvisations and experimented with electronic sounds and made general statements about the hippie culture.

In 1970, Kantner used the name Jefferson Starship on an album. After Jefferson Airplane disbanded, he and Slick formed a new group under that name. The group's style changed, however, as they tended more toward pop ballads than statement-making psychedelic rock. The name was cut short to Starship in the 80's after Kantner left, taking the use of Jefferson with him. In the early 90's, members of Jefferson Airplane, Jefferson Starship, and others formed Jefferson Starship-The Next Generation. They recorded an album in 1995 called *Deep Space/Virgin Sky* that included new songs in addition to some rerecordings of the original group's old hits.

The Santana Blues Band was formed by Mexican-born guitarist, Carlos Santana in 1967. They soon dropped the "blues" part of their name, simply calling themselves Santana. They added two Latin conga drummers to the band, giving themselves a unique sound. Exotic rhythms created by the conga players along with the regular drummer colored the otherwise blues based sound. They became popular outside San Francisco when their performance of *Soul Sacrifice* at Woodstock brought the crowd to its feet.

Listen to Santana---Soul Sacrifice (2:1)

Santana's biggest hit was *Black Magic Woman*. It was originally written by Fleetwood Mac's guitarist, Peter Green.

Listen to Santana---Black Magic Woman (1:10)

Psychedelic Rock Beyond San Francisco

Venice Beach, in Los Angeles became a popular gathering place for southern California hippies. Allen Ginsberg and other beat poets often appeared at coffee houses there to read their poetry. Of the psychedelic groups formed in LA, none was more important than The Doors. Their name was shortened from *The Doors of Perception*, title of a book by Aldous Huxley about the influence of drugs.

For most of their songs, Jim Morrison wrote music to the poetry written by guitarist, Robby Krieger. Their favorite themes were inspired by beat poetry and usually related to drugs and sex. One of their most popular pieces reflects this and is based on an almost hypnotic repetition of the organ theme. When The Doors were invited to perform on the Ed Sullivan Show, they were allowed to perform *Light My Fire*, but only if they would omit the word *higher* and replace it with a word that that could not be taken as a reference to drugs. The Doors agreed, but when they performed on the show, Morrison sang higher clearly and loudly. Since the show was live, it could not be edited.

Listen to The Doors---Light My Fire (2:2)

The Doors had many fans across the country but they were unable to tour extensively because of Morrison's use of alcohol and drugs. He had become undependable on stage and was careless about his language and actions. He was eventually arrested for public obscenity and indecency.

After being arrested for lewd behavior in Miami in 1969, he changed his persona, wore more conservative clothing, gained weight and grew a beard. He became detached from his rock star image. Morrison took a break from the group and moved to Paris in 1971. It was there that he died of a heart attack. After Morrison's death, The Doors were reduced to a trio. They tried to continue, but disbanded in favor of solo projects. In 1978, they released *An American Prayer*, which contained their music dubbed over Morrison's recitations of some of his poetry. The Doors enjoyed a resurgence of popularity in the late 70's and early 80's. Their albums sold better during this period than when they were originally released. Their memory was revived in 1991 when Oliver Stone released the movie, *The Doors*.

Despite the importance of the psychedelic movement in Los Angeles and San Francisco, the movement had spread over the entire country and the world. Jimi Hendrix had moved to London to start his band, The Jimi Hendrix Experience. The basic style of guitar playing by Hendrix was blues-based, but it was influenced by the psychedelic movement. Hendrix always admired Bob Dylan's music. His psychedelic version of Dylan's *All Along the Watchtower* earned him his first top 20 hit in the U.S. Dylan said he liked Hendrix's version and made changes in his own performance as a result of what Hendrix did with it.

Listen to Bob Dylan---All Along the Watchtower (2:3)

Listen to Jimi Hendrix---All Along the Watchtower (2:4)

The Jimi Hendrix Experience broke up in 1969. Hendrix moved back to the U.S. and worked with a variety of musicians. His performance of *The Star Spangled Banner* was a hit at Woodstock in 1969. Through his performance of that piece, he made statements supporting the ideals and attitudes of members of the hippie movement.