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Expository Writing

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The Tribalism of Pop Fans

Music is often examined through a purely acoustic lens. To some, the author can be completely disconnected from the music. Pop music is often spoken worse of for being tribal, and for being focused on the pop idol rather than the music. Because pop idols use music to draw attention to themselves, and because pop fans are attracted to the idol instead of the music, pop music will always have this tribal nature. Noë writes about pop that “the music is, at most, a way of directing your attention to [the pop idol]; *he* captures your attention and your fascination… you look through the music to the person.” (Noë 172) They make it clear that in pop music, the acoustic appeal of the music is a secondary function. The real aim of the music is merely to draw the listener's attention to the idol themselves. This is due to the fact that the artist is intentionally idolizing themselves through their art. This places the pop artist, or rather the idolized image of them, at the center attention of pop music. In other words, all of a pop idols music serves to further emphasize their own image. The effect of this is that the idol develops a cult of personality around pop idol. It is clear that idols are at the center of pop music because the music of pop music expresses the identity of the idol. This contributes to the tribal nature of pop by forming this cult of personality.

If the message of pop music is the identity of the idol, this suggests that pop fans are not really fans of the music, but rather fans of the idol. By examining this attraction, it can be seen how it is not only a physical attraction, but also about a wish to imitate the artist.. “Pop stars are sex symbols, and when we love them, we want in some sense to be like them, or at least to be with them, to have them, to belong to their tribe”. (Noë 172) Noë asserts that because of the way fans are attracted to their idol, they have a develop desire to be like them in some way. The effect of this can be seen in different methods of engaging with pop music, such as singing along, and playing air guitar. Both of these acts mimic the visual appearance of a musical performance, without the functional aspects of the performance. When engaging in this way, the fans become ceremonially like the idol. Because all the fans of a particular idol are copying from the same source material, that idol, they become like each other. This further unify the tribe of the pop artist. Engaging with pop music is about mimicking the idol, because they, not the music, are the object of fans attraction. Pop music is inevitably tribal, because of the idolization of the pop artist through their use of music, and because the fans are attracted to that idolized image rather than the music.