



# seperating the art from the artist

by Brendan DiTullio

Everybody has their Beatles phase at some point in their life. Mine was this past year. The musical stylings of John, Paul, George, and Ringo provided the soundtrack to my freshman year of college. I think Beatlemania is just an inevitable phase of life, much like K-Pop fandoms and mid-life crises. However, as I began to learn more about the fab four, I very quickly realized that they weren't quite as fab as they appeared to be—especially John Lennon. Lennon was known to cheat on his wife, act violent and manipulative towards women, and compulsively lie to those around him. This revelation had me questioning their music, and whether or not it was morally right to continue listening to The Beatles' music catalogue. I then began to ask myself a larger question—what do we do when the music we love was created by problematic people?

The answer is clear: we need to separate the art from the artist. But how can we do that? Art is like a mirror—it's a direct reflection of the self. Artists pour their ideas, experiences, and passions into their work in order to create something greater than themselves. However, does this mean that art is also a reflection of the problematic aspects of the artist as well? In some cases, yes. Take the case of Floridian rapper YNW Melly. In 2018, Melly released his breakout song "Murder on My Mind." In 2019 he was arrested

and charged with two counts of premeditated first-degree murder. The arrest revitalized interest in the song, with it reaching number one on the US Apple Music chart. Melly is a murderous person who wrote a song about his intentions to murder people, so is listening to his music inherently immoral?

Personally, I think listening to the song is acceptable as long as listeners refrain from idolizing YNW Melly and his actions. Music is a deeply personal medium, and because of this, audiences tend to have strong connections with their favorite musical artists. This makes it easy for listeners to idolize artists and put them on a pedestal, regardless of the artist's problematic nature. This is especially true of larger artists, whose cultural impact tends to overshadow their past controversies. A prime example of this is Michael Jackson. The King of Pop notoriously faced multiple pedophilia and molestation accusations, yet his music is still listened to by millions worldwide. Jackson and his estate have repeatedly denied any and all accusations, and many fans who idolize Jackson have done the same. Idolization is a dangerous game, as it can lead fans to deliberately ignore certain truths in favor of personal attachments.

For some musicians, cultural impact is not enough to overshadow their controversies. Country artist Morgan Wallen was caught on camera using a racial slur in 2021, and his public image hasn't been the same since. The parasocial relationship between artists and audiences causes listen-

ers to place trust in their idols. When an artist's controversial actions are revealed, it's almost as if they are betraying the trust of their listeners. For some, this betrayal is enough to stop listening to the artist's music entirely. It's difficult for them to separate the art and the artist, so they quit cold turkey. For some, it's not that easy. Whether it be due to certain memories or feelings associated with the music, many people form attachments that make them keep coming back despite the controversies.

It is these personal attachments that are key when separating the art from the artist. Art may be deeply personal for the artist, but it can be equally personal for the listener. I believe the only way to separate the art from the artist is to treat the art as a separate entity, not as an extension of the artist themselves. This allows us to assign our own meaning to it, regardless of the musician's original intention. In short, listen to the music purely for yourself.

In the track "Getting Better" on The Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, John Lennon sings about how he used to be a cruel person, and how later in life he was striving to be a better man. Before his death, Lennon stated that he was "a violent man who has learned not to be violent and regrets his violence." Whether or not Lennon truly changed is impossible to know. But regardless of who he was as a person, I plan on continuing to listen to and enjoy The Beatles's music not for him, but for myself.