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Rock Solid: Standing Firm for the Culture of Rock Music

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Rock Solid: Standing Firm for the Culture of Rock Music

By Evan Eggers

On December 1st, 2017, Bob Lefsetz, author of *The Lefsetz Letter*, wrote an opinion piece discussing the 2017 Grammy Awards and their nominations. Within his letter, he made such claims as:

“There's culture in hip-hop. Something completely absent from rock.”

“Either you make music with ubiquity and reach a large audience or you're irrelevant... otherwise giving you an award is like giving a kid a soccer trophy for participation.”

The following letter which I sent him soon after is my response to his claims:

“Hi Bob,

I take issue with your statement that culture is "completely absent from rock." The culture of rock, similar to hip-hop, is rebellion. While hip-hop focuses on rebellion tied to race, socioeconomic disparity, and sometimes gender, rock takes a stance against the norms of suburbia, mental health stigma, and against the challenges that come with youth culture.

Since the eighties, with Ozzy Osbourne's "Suicide Solution," rock, metal, and punk have discussed mental health in a way that challenges the societal stigma against mental illness that has been perpetuated for far too long. While some people may argue that rock music encourages suicide and self-harm among other issues, I would challenge them to look at the philanthropic organizations these bands support or start up (HeartSupport, To Write Love on Her Arms, etc.), the lyrical content within of the majority of the scene, and the way that the listeners use the music. Areas of rock culture support mental health culture and fringe culture, and that culture is

what saved my life when I contemplated suicide. The music that put words to my feelings, validated me, and told me I was worthwhile, is a part of a culture that comes together to support each other.

For almost forty years, the rock scene has been on the forefront of mental health activism, among other philanthropic causes, but now it seems that mental health awareness and the culture rock music created is only important now that Logic released a single that directs people to the suicide hotline. Don't get me wrong, I'm glad that people are learning more about suicide and the resources available to treat/prevent it, but why is it that the movement rock musicians and listeners have been advocating for since the 1980s is only important when someone in another camp stands up? Claiming such is on par with suggesting that white people are responsible for the popularity of jazz. Oddly enough, Nic Larocca, an early 20th century jazz artist, claimed that he was the pioneer of jazz and according to him, “the negroes learned to play this rhythm and music from the whites.” It is flat out wrong, and so is denying the cultural significance behind rock music.

The struggles of mental health culture and outcast culture are difficult to understand, so someone without mental illnesses may not see that it exists, but it does. One of the greatest things about the Grammys is that it is a platform from which every scene can find the same kind of national and international recognition for their achievements. You can't have Music's Biggest Night without everyone, just like you can't have the Oscars without recognizing documentaries. Sure, the number of people interested in the documentary scene will be much smaller than those looking for the next blockbuster, but the contributions made to film are just as important.

Your analogy to a participation ribbon implies that there is only one market for music, when we have been separated by the fracturing of genres and subgenres since the seventies.

Furthermore, it suggests that people only make music for the number of records they sell or hits they generate, not for the sake of art. If Apple penetrates the market for technology and creates a machine people will enjoy, the creators of the products have done their job. If a metal band writes a song that resonates with listeners in the metal scene, they have accomplished something worthwhile.

Rock music has every right to be at the Grammys and to have their culture recognized as much as every other genre. I will be rooting for Childish Gambino's "Redbone" as much as I will for August Burns Red's "Identity" because of the impact they each have for the cultural issues they so tastefully discuss.

You were right, though. At first you did "piss me off." But because of the culture I come from, I have a duty to set aside my feelings and speak out for the good of the cause of mental health. There is still a horrifying stigma against mental illnesses and against those seeking treatment.

I hope you find this insightful, or that it at least helps you consider another perspective.

Thanks for always opening up some good discussions!

Sincerely,

Evan Eggers