



# ARE RAPPERS THE REAL ROCKSTARS?

Cast your mind back to October, 2013. Zane Lowe is conducting THAT infamous interview with Kanye West, when the hip-hop artist – almost off his seat in anger and adrenaline – shouts down the microphone, “We the real rockstars, and I’m the biggest of all of them.” Precisely five years later, and we have to ask ourselves, how much has changed? Rock fans have waited in vain, sure in the knowledge that this generation’s ‘next big thing’ was just around the corner. Sure in the knowledge that the next Jim Morrison or David Bowie was on the cusp of discovery. Yet the genre’s knight in shining armour remains absent, and a saviour is still yet to be seen.

To tackle the question, we must think about the fundamentals of what we expect from so-called rockstars. We expect fame. Charisma. Attitude. Chaos. A life of excess. Innovation of music that pushes the genre to new heights. Spearheading new trends in the fashion industry. The creation of a counter-culture. And, more so than anything else, no apologies for any of the above. Rockstars of old ticked all of these boxes, regardless of the era that they found themselves in. In the last two decades, however, the strew of cultural rock icons has run dry.

The arrival of brit-pop in the mid-90’s began to mellow the mood of rock’n’roll in comparison to previous generations. It brought with it a celebration of being ‘normal’ and a nostalgic glorification of the straight, white, male, British working-class. Whilst the Gallaghers lived up to almost every stereotype, rock icons of the 90’s slowly shed the well known characteristics of the rock gods that came before them. Innovation was the first of which to take a major hit. Experimentation of any form became muted; instrumentation and song structure was simplified, the androgyny of the 80’s was swept under the rug, and fashion was more reserved and safer than it had ever been before. The era produced some truly incredible music, yet the wheels were set in motion and the death of rock’n’roll had just begun.

The sanitisation of rock music was well underway by the mid-2000’s, and the carpet was rolled out for the ‘nice’, cardigan-wearing indie generation to take centre stage. The Arctic Monkeys are now undoubtedly the biggest rock band in the country but they’re a prime example of how rock has lost its edge. They continue to dominate the U.K. alternative scene after 15 years of crafting their seemingly untouchable pedestal – and yet, this is a band whose most dramatic front-page-

grabbing headline was the very amicable 2011 breakup between the frontman and a TV presenter. So, can the Monkeys REALLY be considered rockstars? Because, for all of their musical might, they still encompass everything that is sanitised about the rock scene today.

**“EVERY SINGLE CHARACTERISTIC OF A ROCKSTAR IS BEING LIVED UP TO BY THESE BOLD, YOUNG, ARTISTS”**

In this barren rock’n’roll wasteland that we have found ourselves in, swooping in to reign supreme – like the Germanic barbarian horde that conquered Italy after the great fall of Rome – was rap music. The genre has undergone a revolution in every sense of the word, and in 2017 rap surpassed rock as America’s most popular genre. For the first time in history, in the long 40 year war of six-strings vs turntables, the tides have finally turned.

One of the key factors in this shift is that rap artists are now living up to all the stereotypes that we expect of modern day rockstars. A\$AP ROCKY is rapping about hotel room threesomes on week long acid trips, something you would typically expect to hear from a band like The Grateful Dead. Travis Scott was arrested onstage for inciting a riot, eerily reminiscent to the Jim Morrison indecent of the same nature. BROCKHAMPTON, a rap group who are redefining the term ‘boy band’ and whose leader is openly gay, are sitting at #1 on the album charts with an experimental hip-hop album. XXXTentacion and Mac Miller are sadly dying young under dramatic circumstances, evocative of the infamous 27

club of old. Stormzy is out here like a young, black, modern-day Lennon, fighting for social change and spearheading the countries greatest political struggles. Skepta is at Fashion Week “sitting front row with the black tracksuit”, making a stamp on the fashion world that is being translated directly back into youth culture of today. Death Grips are playing shows with all the ferocious energy of an early Black Flag. And Lil Pump is forming mosh pits at Reading and Leeds Festival that even Queens of The Stone Age would be envious of.

The genre of hip-hop is also being pushed forward into new realms of musicality. Artists like Kendrick Lamar, Tyler The Creator and Childish Gambino are raising the bar with their volume of output and constant innovation. Experimental artists such as JPEGMAFIA are subverting everything that we expect from, not only the genre, but music itself. And finally, so-called ‘mumble rappers’ and ‘trap rappers’ have opened the door to a totally new sub-genre of both music and culture with their distinctive style, their triplet flows and their down-tempo, hi-hat heavy beats that are seeping endlessly into the mainstream.

This blossoming new era are living lives of completely unrivalled chaos and producing a musical output that is second to none. Every single characteristic expected of a rockstar is being lived up to by these bold, young, artists – more so than any other, the most important characteristic of all: their completely unapologetic attitude. Rap is the new rock. It’s true, and they don’t give a fuck if you think otherwise.